

STUDIES IN GERMAN IDEALISM

PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION IN GERMAN IDEALISM

Edited by William Desmond, Ernst-Otto Onnasch and
Paul Cruysberghs

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PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION IN GERMAN IDEALISM

Studies in German Idealism

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***This book is
dedicated to
Ludwig Heyde (†)***

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PREFACE

This book contains the selected proceedings of a conference on Religion in German Idealism which took place in Nijmegen (Netherlands) in January 2000. The conference was organized by the Centre of German Idealism, which co-ordinates the research on classical German philosophy in the Netherlands and in Belgium. Generous support of the Dutch Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) has made this conference possible. A few months after the conference Ludwig died, and this circumstance unexpectedly delayed efforts to bring the proceedings of the conference to published form. We are now happy to present those proceedings, dedicated to the memory of the founding father of the Centre. It was a great joy to work with Ludwig; it was an even greater joy to be reckoned amongst his friends. It was part of Ludwig's distinctive charisma that he was able to combine friendship together with collaboration in philosophical and scholarly work.

William Desmond
Ernst-Otto Onnasch
Paul Cruysberghs

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INTRODUCTION

WILLIAM DESMOND, ERNST-OTTO ONNASCH and
PAUL CRUYSBERGHS

1

The studies in this book testify to the intimate relation of philosophy and religion in German idealism, a relation not also devoid of tensions, and indeed conflicts. Idealism gave expression to a certain affirmation of the autonomy of philosophical reason, but this autonomy was one that tried to take into account the importance of religion. Sometimes the results of this claim to autonomy moved towards criticism of religion. Sometimes the results claimed to be more constructive in reforming the relation of philosophy and religion. Sometimes the outcome was a new questioning of philosophy itself and a different appreciation of religion. All of these possibilities are represented in the studies of this book.

It will be helpful first to note a number of crucial considerations that serve to define the problematic situation of religion in that era, and the relation of philosophical reflection to religion. We might begin with some more general considerations before turning to more specific details. Many of these considerations still define our current situation, and point to the continued significance of a study of German idealism. Three major considerations can be noted: first, relative to the devalued thereness of nature in a mechanistic world picture; second, relative to the human being as autonomous and claiming to be an end in self; third, relative to the sense of divine transcendence as other to human autonomy.

First, relative to nature, we encounter the tendency of the objectifying sciences (then Newtonian mechanism) to lead to a valueless thereness, shorn of immanent traces of the divine. One thinks then, by contrast, of the appeal of Spino-

zism and pantheism: these we might see as reactions against the valueless objectivity of mechanistic science, and as efforts to try to regain some sense of the immanence of the divine. Think here also of the manner in which Hegel and his generation were captive in different ways to the dream of Greece. Greece held before the gaze of that generation a vision of immanent wholeness in which nature was saturated with ambiguous but real signs of the divine.

Second, there is the central concern with the human being as an end in itself, partly defined over against the otherwise valueless thereness of nature. It is interesting to remark on the way these two sides proceed in tandem: nature hugely objectified; the human being more and more subjectified. For if there are no traces of the divine in nature, or no presence of inherent value, then human beings alone, it seems, can take on this function of being ends in themselves. This is very clear in Kant where the human being alone is an end in self in a nature otherwise devoid of such ends. Consult the last half of the *Critique of Judgment* where this is central. There the issue is fundamentally the possibility of a theology in such a nature and with respect to such a vision of human morality. As one recalls, Kant alone allows the possibility of an *ethical theology*, in admittedly a very qualified sense.

Perhaps the difficulty here continues and masks the perplexity as experienced earlier by Pascal: the human experience of fear and solitude in the immensity of the strange cosmic spaces. Unlike Kant, Pascal does not find his heart filled with wonder at the starry skies above. He finds silence and emptiness. And indeed there is a sense in which Kant did too, in that apart from man, there seems to be no inherent end in nature. Perhaps Kant masked from himself his proximity to the pathos of Pascal with a moral consolation. Others will not be so morally kind on themselves or on such a valueless nature. Nor indeed did Pascal draw consolation from the moral law within. In the human heart he also found horror and something monstrous: wretchedness, though also grandeur. Pascal was a mathematical genius who yet had finesse for the excesses of the human heart. And it is true that the times we are dealing with here found

more peace in the vision of the human being as morally autonomous than as thus excessive in the Pascalian sense. But the excess will reassert itself in due course.

Third, bound up with a dedivinized nature and a self-affirming autonomous humanity, there follows the problematic place of all appeals to *transcendence*. This is perhaps the nub of the issue with respect to religion and its relation to philosophy. The culture of Enlightenment was a culture of reason, which affirms the native power of the human mind to accomplish through itself its quest for truth. This seemed evident, not only in the increasing autonomy claimed by the particular sciences, but in the most radical claim made for philosophical reason itself, as the epitome of reason that determines itself and that in seeking its own justification finally must be self-justifying. Does not this seem the very essence of philosophy: autonomous reason, determining through itself its own resources to know, and thus also determining for itself the proper paths and successes possible for truth?

Not only does this create the more obvious tension between autonomous reason and theology as appealing to faith, it also shapes a view of the proper culture of humanity. If self-determining reason is the highest human power, all of human culture is to be seen in its light; and hence also any appeal to a transcendence that is other to our autonomy has to justify itself before the tribunal of that reason. But in the nature of the case here, any appeal to transcendence must come before that tribunal making a case for itself that departs from the terms on which autonomy decides the case. Any such appeal to transcendence clearly comes before this tribunal already hobbled by its reference to the ultimate as beyond human autonomy and self-determination. From the viewpoint of this autonomous reason, every such "beyond" must appear suspect.

One might suggest indeed that there is not only a tension between the respective emphases of autonomy and transcendence; there may well be a certain antinomy between them. If transcendence is absolute, one will have to relativize autonomy. If autonomy is absolute, one will have to relativize transcendence. If a certain form of being religious is

tempted to the former possibility, a certain form of philosophy is tempted towards the latter. It could also be said that many religious people and philosophers tried to negotiate some *modus vivendi* between autonomy and transcendence.

Given these considerations about nature, the human being and divine transcendence, one might see the relation of idealism to religion as itself stressed in this tension of autonomy and transcendence. In the main, we find a tendency to give the pride of place to self-determining reason, but in a manner that tries, in its own way, to find some justified place for transcendence. One consequence of this, however, is that then transcendence tends to end up in the form of an *immanent* transcendence. Thus in the confluence of an ethos of autonomy, with the attractions of Spinozistic pantheism, as well as the allure of Greek immanence, the traditional claims of God's transcendence, such as comes to us from the Judeo-Christian heritage, will call out for reassessment, if not reformulation. Perhaps we find this most radically in the reconfiguration of Christianity by Hegel in his doctrine of the worldly immanence of spirit. For Hegel tried to take into account all the factors present in this confluence of influences.

In general, the idealistic philosophers tended to follow the way of the Whole or the One; hence they tended to relativize any transcendence as other (a mere "beyond"), since this seems to lead back to dualism and hence to reduplicate what they saw as the problem, rather than solving it. The Kantians try to assert human autonomy together with some very qualified form of divine transcendence vis-a-vis the moral law. Thinkers like Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi insist on a kind of "either/or": either autonomous reason, but then we end in Spinozism, pantheism, naturalism, atheism; or else a primal source of knowing, always already given, call it "faith." Either nihilism or God: there is no in-between. By contrast, philosophies of mediation are not satisfied with this lack of a third, Hegel especially, and attempt to find resources of mediation in both religion and philosophy. Here again though, mediation finally stands under the ultimacy of philosophy whose rational mediation is more absolute in form than the representational mediation of religion. And

this, of course, is rejected in that form by Kierkegaard who, though a foe of German idealism, is so steeped in its resources that it is impossible now to read the idealists, especially Hegel, without hearing in the distance his howl of protest.

Mention was made above, in relation to Pascal, of the return of *the excessive*. Here one might say also that the idealistic tilt to autonomous self-determination and immanent transcendence is only a short step from the more negative deconstructions of religion by radical atheists who use the instruments of idealistic dialectic but turn away from the speculative and reconciling purpose we find in Hegel. Feuerbach and Marx are the black sheep of the idealistic family, as Nietzsche is the mutant descendent in the family of sovereign autonomy, branding with his mark of “no” all those whom he saw guilty of a comprised accommodation with religion, especially Christianity. What was the moral of Nietzsche’s preaching? Dare to be radically autonomous; be transcendence oneself, there is no other; transcendence is our own transcendence!

During the high noon of German idealism, we find responses mainly drawing on the resources of Kant’s turn to transcendental subjectivity, while yet aiming to complete the critique of mere “givenness,” and hence to complete the critique of that trace of dependence on the divine that is the traditional hall mark of religious transcendence. We are enjoined to complete the Kantian turn by recovering an immanent sense of rich nature and of human self-transcendence as evident in the diverse spheres of historical culture. After the high noon of German idealism, we find the social self-transcendence towards the perfected immanent society of Marx. We also find the individual creative self-transcendence of the *Übermensch*. We also leave the space of Spinozistic geometry for that of Dionysian rhapsody, a space of poetic autonomy not rational. This poetry of self-creation is still today a very widespread response to the stress between autonomy and transcendence, but it has its roots in the classical period of German idealism. Its continuation also causes one to ask: suppose the tilt towards autonomy in the relation of autonomy and transcendence were not accepted;

suppose there were a transcendence ultimate than our autonomy and which implied that our autonomy had to be relativized; would we not have to consider if we need an entire rethinking of the relation of philosophy and religion, a rethinking which would not coincide with the efforts of that era, both in its achievements and its deconstructed aftermath?

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These are large and general considerations, but let us now look in a little more detail at how religion became one of the key issues in classical German philosophy. It took some time before this issue assumed its full dimensions. A key event was the questioning of the central dogma of the *Aufklärung* – its faith in reason – by Jacobi in his *Briefe über die Lehre des Spinoza*, first published in 1785. With this publication a debate arose in which nearly all major figures of the time participated. At stake in this historically crucial discussion was the hegemony of reason which, according to Jacobi, did not support the essential truths of religion, but rather led necessarily to a flagrant atheism. Clearly in question here was something at the very core of philosophy itself. Traditionally, philosophy claimed to be the mother of reason, caring for things rational and their growth. That reason should lead to nihilism, as Jacobi's provocative criticism suggested, was indeed an "explosion" in the German intellectual world, and not only there. In our time, a version of the same issue still troubles many minds. Although the words may have changed, the battle in philosophy today is still between reason and something other that reason is not able to acknowledge properly, something other of such a high significance for human life that reason is also incapable of replacing it. More strongly put, the claim is that every undertaking of reason must inevitably take us away from the truth embedded in this "something other." Reason, it is said, is the faculty with covers up and hides all essential truths. It must be asked if this leads in the end to a form of

irrationalism. If it is true that reason takes us away from the very truths of life, do we then end up in an “*Entweder-Oder*,” in the unresolved dilemma between reason and belief? Or is there a way or ways of surpassing the dilemma posed by such an “either-or?”

Classical German philosophy can be interpreted as the quest to go beyond the boundaries of discussion set by the Pantheism Controversy (*Pantheismusstreit*).¹ This controversy began in the summer of 1783, and was at its height in late 1786. Kant himself had perhaps already suggested some guidelines for a solution to the problem in his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* of 1781. Of course, it was only 12 years later that Kant himself offered a fully developed theory on religion in his *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (1793). The Kantian response to the controversy is formulated by Carl Leonhard Reinhold in his *Briefe über die Kantische Philosophie* which appeared in 1786.²

The first letter in this publication formulates the logical structure of the arguments in the Pantheism Controversy in the following way: “The incompatibility of these doctrinal systems is made so very clear, that the defenders of these systems prove themselves wrong as soon they start to prove the system, and in the end what is shown is that they have merely refuted a different opinion without having proved their own.”³ Reinhold’s analysis of the situation is based upon the Kantian doctrine of the antinomies, as applied to the historical situation of the Pantheism Controversy. In ac-

¹ For the background to this controversy, see the fine study of Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason. German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1987) chapter 2.

² These *Briefe* appeared from August 1786 till September 1787 in *Der teutsche Merkur*. A revised and enlarged version of these *Briefe* is published by Reinhold under the same title in two volumes in Leipzig 1790 and 1792.

³ *Briefe über die Kantische Philosophie*, Erster Brief: “Bedürfniß einer Kritik der Vernunft,” in: *Der Teutsche Merkur* (August 1786) 111-2: “Die Unverträglichkeit dieser Lehrgebäude ist so sehr ins reine gebracht, daß die Anhänger derselben, ... sich ... widerlegen ..., sobald sie zu beweisen anfangen; und am Ende zeigt sich, daß sie bloß eine fremde Meynung widerlegten, ohne die ihrige bewiesen zu haben.”

cordance with the dialectical triad concerning the development of metaphysics that Kant introduced – namely, “dogmatism, scepticism, criticism”⁴ – Reinhold argues that the viewpoint of dogmatism must necessarily in the process of *Aufklärung* give rise to antinomies, which can only be solved by the critical standpoint of the Kantian philosophy. Doubt brings up the question of whether a universally satisfactory answer to the existence of God is possible at all. According to Reinhold, the question facing philosophy is whether such an answer can be at all possible.⁵ The overarching question is: “What is possible in terms of reason itself.”⁶ Reinhold claims to show that there is an antinomy at the heart of the Pantheism Controversy which lies in a mistaken understanding of the relation of reason and belief.⁷ He believed the matter had been properly addressed some years earlier with the publication of Kant’s *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. For in that book we find Kant’s defence of a faith in reason (*Vernunftglaube*).⁸ In his third and fourth letter Reinhold offers an account which tries to restore the unity of reason and belief on the basis of this Kantian faith in reason.

Reinhold’s *Briefe* were met with the greatest of interest. They turned Reinhold into the rising star of the new ways of philosophizing that we then emerging. Soon after the publication of the *Briefe* he became a professor in Jena (1787). There he encountered a huge audience of students who longed to become part of the intellectual revolution whose contagion was felt by many people at that time.⁹ In the years following, however, a front was formed that stood against the new Kantian philosophy. Here we meet some of the so-called Popular Philosophers (*Popularphilosophen*) who held that Kantian philosophy did not penetrate the true nature of

⁴ Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Riga 1781, ix (page numbers on Kant according Akademie-Ausgabe).

⁵ Cf. *Briefe über die Kantische Philosophie*, Erster Brief, cf. note 3, 115.

⁶ Cf. Ibid. 116.

⁷ Cf. Ibid. 135.

⁸ Cf. Ibid. 137-8.

⁹ To offer some figures: In 1793, the year before Reinhold left Jena, almost 600 of the 860 officially registered students visited his lectures.

reason with its common sense (*gesunder Menschenverstand*) as they interpreted it. Common sense should be the final authority for morality and religion. In the end, however, such a common sense philosophy failed to provide any new or remarkable insights into the issue concerning religious belief.

One significant consequence of the Pantheism Controversy was that governmental authorities began to interfere with the freedom of speech and publication. In Prussia the new king Friedrich Wilhelm II (who ruled from 1786 to 1797) commissioned his minister of culture, justice and ecclesiastical affairs J. Chr. Wöllner to promulgate in 1788 a decree allowing the censoring of publications dealing with religion. Johann Gottlieb Fichte was one of the first victims of this decree. The censoring authorities at the university of Halle withheld his first publication, *Versuch einer Kritik aller Offenbarung*. But after the intervention of the new dean at the faculty of theology the book was allowed to be printed. Fichte wrote his book in a few weeks, but its success was overwhelming. The book printer Hartung made two versions, one for Königsberg and environs, and one for the rest of Germany. This last version appeared anonymously in the Easter of 1792. Due to the style and spirit in which the book was written, many readers took it to be the long expected study on religion by Kant. In August of 1792 Kant made a public announcement denying that he was the author of this book. Its real author was rather the candidate in theology, Fichte. Fichte became famous overnight.

Fichte's first publication dealt with the Kantian claim that revelation does not enlarge our theoretical knowledge. As a consequence, this question becomes urgent: within a non-theoretical understanding of revelation, how then is it possible to speak meaningfully about God and revelation? There exists a tension in Kant's critical philosophy between duty and duty's actual practicability, given that the moral good depends for its realization on the external world, i.e. nature. According to Fichte, this can only be resolved if nature in its totality is predetermined by a moral being who is God. In God moral necessity and absolute physical freedom are unified. Therefore the existence of God must be presup-

posed in the same necessary way as is the moral law. In a outpouring of enthusiasm, Reinhold wrote to his friend Baggesen: "The riddle is now solved, now I know that revelation is possible and how far!"¹⁰ Daniel Breazeale deals further below with Fichte's contribution.

A year after Fichte's book appeared Kant published his own extended study of religion: *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (1793). The first part of this book appeared in the famous *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, which the editors in early 1792 had moved outside Prussia to Jena because of the hated decree of Wöllner. Consequently the book was not issued under Prussian law. This was perceived as a slap in the face to the keepers of Prussian law, especially since the Prussian censors had already rejected a part of the publication. Notwithstanding this, the main purpose of this book was to show that morality leads inevitably to religion. Reason needs religion, because otherwise what Kant saw as the human being's predilection for evil (*Hang zum Bösen*) would have the same right of reason as our predisposition for the good (*Anlage zum Guten*). The conception of religion Kant here offers differs from his earlier conception, especially as expressed in the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* where religion has a founding relevance for morality. Religion, as Kant now defines it, becomes rather "knowledge of all duties as divine commands."¹¹ Christianity is interpreted as founded in a moral principle that accords with the moral law of an autonomous obligating reason. Not belief but the belief in reason (*Vernunftglaube*) is the condition of the pos-

¹⁰ Cf. Johann Gottlieb Fichte im Gespräch. *Berichte der Zeitgenossen*, hrsg. E. Fuchs (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: frommann-holzboog 1978 ff.) vol. 1, 35: "Baggesen! dieses Räthsel ist nun aufgelöset ... Ich weiß nun, daß ich nur die Hälfte der religiösen Überzeugung besessen habe, welche unsere philosophische Moralthologie gewährt; ich weiß ... nun, daß Offenbarung möglich ist, und inwiefern sie möglich ist, begreife diese Möglichkeit aus der Natur der praktischen Vernunft, und glaube an die Göttlichkeit des Christenthums im eigentlichsten Verstande."

¹¹ Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (Riga: J.F. Hartknoch 1788) 233 and *Kritik der Urtheilskraft* (Berlin/Libau: Lagarde 1790) 477.

sibility for founding the moral authority of the moral law. The contribution of Martin Moors below has more to say about this.

It is this later view and not the earlier conception that Fichte anticipated in his *Versuch*. Religion offers only the supporting means for our being more strongly determined by the moral law.¹² And because religion is always contaminated with sensuality (*Sinnlichkeit*), religion is said to be founded in the need that sensuality conveys. In any case, for Fichte to understand God as a substance is impossible and contradictory. The living and active moral-order is God; any other conception of God we cannot grasp.¹³ Belief in the moral world-order supplies us with the “true religion of joyfully performing the right.”¹⁴

A difficulty that is not solved by Fichte is the relation between the moral world-order and the individual intelligence. According to Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, to determine that relation we must speak of the absolute. He characterizes the elevation to this common ground of the moral world-order and intelligence as the “system of providence (*System der Vorsehung*), i.e. religion in the only true meaning of the word.”¹⁵ This is a remarkable move. Fichte stated that the moral world-order was God, whereas Schelling places religion at a higher level, a level above the moral world-order and particular individuality. In this conception Schelling, in fact, restores something of the distinction between the conditioned and the unconditioned that was made by Jacobi in his *Spinoza-book*, a book read by the students in Tübingen with great enthusiasm. Jacobi argued that all demonstration can only be conditioned and thus can only

¹² Cf. *Versuch einer Kritik aller Offenbarung* (1792). J.G. Fichte-Gesamtausgabe, hrsg. von R. Lauth and H. Gliwitzky (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: frommann-holzboog) Abt. I, Bd. 1, 58 (hereafter GA)

¹³ Cf. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Ueber den Grund unseres Glaubens an eine göttliche Weltregierung* (1798), GA I/5:354-56.

¹⁴ Cf. *Ibidem*, 356.

¹⁵ Cf. Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *System des transzendentalen Idealismus* (1800). *Sämmtliche Werke*, hrsg. von K.F.A. Schelling, (München: Cotta 1856-61) Abt. I, Bd. 1, 601.

give us mediated and finite knowledge. Nevertheless, the possibility of thinking the conditioned, according to Jacobi, also implies the unconditioned. Thus conditioned knowledge presupposes an unconditioned certainty (*Gewißheit*) that itself is not confined to the conditioned. A conditioned character belongs to the finite nature of beings, i.e. a certain positiveness to be this or that; but an infinite and unsurpassable (*unhintergebar*) being must precede all such finite being. Hölderlin calls this being an “absolute being” or a “being per se” (*Seyn schlechthin*) that precedes all division into object and subject.¹⁶ About this primal or unconditioned being we possess an unconditioned certainty whereby it is present in our finite being. This shows that this absolute being is not the equivalent of Spinoza’s immanent conception of substance. The presence of the unconditioned in the conditioned, it is claimed, makes available to us an adequate definition of the essential Christian doctrine of revelation. The unconditioned can thus be interpreted as the personal God, present in us but also unsurpassable by our determinative, hence finite knowledge.

Schelling’s new conception of God and religion was the result of discussions concerning the practical religion of Kant and the supernaturalism of Gottlob Christian Storr, the very influential professor in theology at the Tübinger Stift. According to Storr, the Kantian and Fichtian philosophies of religion, in the end, are nothing other than systems of accommodation, i.e. forms of religious naturalism. This understanding seems to be shared by the young Schelling, as M. Franz has pointed out.¹⁷ According to such a system of accommodation, the founders of Christianity – Jesus Christ included – adjusted their message to what people in that time were able to understand. The consequence of such a system of accommodation, associated with J.S. Semler, was that the *whole* of revelation could not be understood as

¹⁶ Cf. Friedrich Hölderlin, *Urtheil und Seyn* (ca. 1795). *Sämtliche Werke. Große Stuttgarter Ausgabe*, Bd. 4, hrsg. von F. Beißner und A. Beck (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 1961) 216–17.

¹⁷ Michael Franz, *Schellings Tübinger Platon-Studien* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1996) 119.

the word of God. Storr, by contrast, took the position that the Christian writings originate in the authority of God and thus the Bible must be interpreted and understood in this way. Not only the Bible, but also the articles of Christian faith – i.e. the Trinity, original sin, the divinity of Jesus Christ – must be understood as an authentic part of revelation. These symbols of Christian faith have always led to various forms of heterodoxy or even heresy. In this context, the dogma of the Trinity is of great interest. Christian Friedrich Rößler, professor of history at Tübingen, deconstructed the conception, handed down by Johann Jacob Brucker, that Platonism has exercised influence on the Church fathers up to the Council of Nicaea. The self-mediation of God in the dogma of the divine trinity is taken by Schelling and Hegel as *the* finest expression and unsurpassed explanation of the absolute. Neither followed the view common in the early 1790s in Tübingen under the influence of Kantian philosophy which interpreted all Christian “dogmas as postulates of practical reason.”¹⁸ This interpretation of Christian belief provoked Fichte’s critique of revelation, as Hegel points out and Schelling agrees.¹⁹ Both philosophers agreed – at that time – that there is a revelation and that the content of this is impossible to surpass by reason, even though this revelation still is something reasonable.

The last point is important, because Johann Friedrich Flatt, the talented student of Storr and the most philosophical thinker in Tübingen, had claimed that Kantian critical philosophy, though it does not ignore the necessity of revelation for practical philosophy, nevertheless makes no effort to determine the content of Christian religion and revelation. Hence it leads into a “completely blind belief,” which is

¹⁸ Cf. the letter of Schelling to Hegel from 6 January 1795, in: *Briefe von und an Hegel*, hrsg. von J. Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag 1952) Bd. 1, 13.

¹⁹ Cf. the letter of Hegel to Schelling from the end of January 1795 and Schelling’s answer from 4 February in: *Briefe von und an Hegel*, op. cit., Bd. 1, 15–19.

nothing less than “sceptical atheism.”²⁰ This consequence Schelling and Hegel seemed to accept, and they agreed with Flatt and Storr that the theoretical proof for the existence of God cannot be neglected. These young Tübinger did not quite endorse the hermeneutic and historical method that Storr used to produce this proof, but history becomes a key notion for both philosophers.

In any case, to understand the development of the philosophy of religion in German idealism, it is important to see that Schelling and Hegel tried to avoid the critique of their teachers in Tübingen that the transcendental interpretation of religion in Kant and Fichte leads to an empty, i.e. content-less concept of belief. In interpreting God as Jacobi did, namely, as the unconditioned that is present in everything conditioned – a concept that can be understood as the true meaning of Christian revelation – there emerges a concept of religion that claims to be reasonable, although one that also is said to be surpassed by reason.

This is the standpoint that both Hegel and Schelling embraced up to the time of Schelling leaving Jena in 1803. The relative short period Hegel and Schelling worked in Jena – Hegel came in 1800 to Jena – resulted in an important divergence in the manner of conceiving the absolute. For Schelling, the absolute is unsurpassable (*unhintergebar*) but fully present in the finite world. Although during his life he changes his philosophical conception quite a few times, the conviction remains that the absolute or God cannot be surpassed by reason. Hegel moves in a counter direction. This first took place in private discussions with Schelling. The emendations of his early system that Schelling makes in developing his new system of identity (*Identitätssystem*) were the result of these discussions, as K. Düsing pointed out recently. In the years after 1803, Hegel started to elaborate his own system of philosophy. His aim was to elaborate the structure of the absolute itself. This becomes very clear

²⁰ Johann Friedrich Flatt, *Briefe über den moralischen Erkenntnisgrund der Religion überhaupt, und besonders in Beziehung auf die kantische Philosophie*, (Tübingen: Cotta 1789).

in his second major publication, the *Wissenschaft der Logik* (1812/16). According to Hegel the absolute cannot be a structure enclosed in itself, but must be reasonable in itself. If the absolute is present in the finite, as he claimed, philosophy cannot stop with a system of the mediation of this absolute in nature and spirit, but must also mediate the structure of this mediation. Otherwise, he held, it could not be proven whether it was truly the absolute that was at stake in our knowing.

Hegel's *Wissenschaft der Logik* sought, at least in intention, to unveil the inner structure and essence of the absolute. In Hegel's words the *Logik* expresses the thoughts of God before the creation of nature and finite spirit. The development of these thoughts is structured according to the absolute itself, i.e. the absolute idea. The structure of reality is submitted to this absolute. Essential for Hegel is, of course, the belief that God, i.e. Jesus Christ, did walk on the earth and spoke to us. Without this revelation, it would be impossible to have any true knowledge of the absolute. In this respect revelation seems to be presupposed by Hegel's system of philosophy. In contrast to Hegel's time, in our time it is possible, or even *bon ton*, to deny or repudiate the Christian belief in revelation. The question then is whether Hegel's philosophy must also be put aside, since it seems to presuppose revelation. One proposed answer has been that, in this case, the truth of the Christian religion is no longer relevant for philosophy. The same holds true for theology, in as much as theology is conceived as a science. The result seems to be that the Christian religion and philosophy, i.e. science, cease to use the same concept of truth. What is true for science is not necessarily true in religion and vice versa. But what is the truth of this statement itself? How is it possible to distinguish reasonably between two different realms of truth, without simultaneously surpassing these realms with a kind of meta-truth? Religion and belief, philosophy and reason seem to be indivisible in every discourse dealing with truth. Does dividing them from each other, as for example Jacobi did, lead to a position that finally does not satisfy either religion or philosophy? This was at least

one of the central questions posed in classical German philosophy. Nor is the question yet closed in our time.

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Let us now briefly look at the individual studies in this book. The contributions have been ordered in a chronological way. Beginning with Walter Jaeschke's contribution which can be considered as a general introduction to the problematic of religion in German Idealism, we move to Martin Moors' account of Kant's positioning of religion within the moral schematism, followed by Daniel Breazeale's discussion of Fichte's *Versuch einer Kritik aller Offenbarung* (1792). These are followed by several contributions on Hegel's philosophy of religion by Ludwig Heyde, Stephen Houlgate, Sander Griffioen and Tom Rockmore. The book concludes with a reflection by William Desmond who looks back at the endeavour of German Idealism to offer a philosophical interpretation of religion showing the poverty of reason rather than its power. While the book does not cover all the possible positions available within German idealism, nevertheless its aim is to highlight some of the major issues addressed by many of its significant thinkers.

Walter Jaeschke's contribution, "Philosophy after the Death of God," takes its starting point in Hegel's catchphrase that "God is dead." This indicates a crisis in philosophical theology that, so Jaeschke claims, is part of the internal constitution of this theology itself. The endeavour to express the thought of God by means of reason seems to explode all formulations of that thought from inside out. This explosion is demonstrated by three topics that constitute the historical and systematic preconditions of the philosophy of religion around 1800: the person and attributes of God, the theme of theodicy, and the topic of physico-theology. At the end of the 18th century the crisis of philosophical theology seemed to end in an atheism of theoretical reason and in the resignation suggested by the phrase "God is dead." Never-

theless, this did not mean the end of philosophical theology. On the contrary, philosophical theology was replaced by, and in some instances transformed into, a philosophy of religion.

Jaeschke outlines the three different options taken, leaving aside a fourth option, one that gives up philosophy and remains content with what might be termed a non-philosophical, positive religion.

The first option sought the modification of philosophical theology in consonance with the intellectual potential of the philosophical concept. It modified the theistic God in the direction of a pantheistic one. The neo-Spinozism of Lessing and Herder can be seen from this perspective. Instead of calling reason into question, it was rather the traditional conception of God that was rejected.

The second option consisted in the retention of the theistic conception of God at the cost of abandoning the instruments of traditional philosophical theology. The means of theoretical reason were replaced by those of practical reason. This marked a transition from rational or physico-theology to an ethical theology. Kant's doctrine of the postulates is to be understood as such an option. Here for the first time the idea of "philosophy of religion" appeared, in the sense of "a doctrine of religion by philosophical means" dealing with the person of God and the immortality of the soul. Kant's purely moral conception of God was thus connected with a purely moral interpretation of religion. The conceptual shortcomings of the Kantian ethical theology were shown by Fichte. Fichte no longer conceived of the moral world-order as something on the basis of which one could draw conclusions about God: he thought of that world-order as God. With that contention the first link between an ethico-theological concept of God and a moral interpretation of religion came to an end.

The third option was the one found in Schelling's book on *Human Freedom*. Schelling tried to avoid the problems of theodicy by incorporating into the very concept of God the difference between the ground of His existence, namely nature in God, and His existence.

These three forms of reaction to the crisis of philosophical theology still operated within the perspective of a reformed philosophical theology. Jaeschke argues that philosophy of religion as a distinct discipline only arose in terms of conditions expressed by the feeling of the death of God, namely, at that moment when any self-evident recourse to a belief in God, whether it is Biblical or philosophically-theologically grounded, had forfeited its indubitability. From this point on philosophy of religion tends to conceive religion as a cultural phenomenon that, for the most part, is compatible with other forms of spiritual life. Only under this condition can religion become the legitimate object of philosophy. Such a view of religion we find, for instance, in Schleiermacher's speeches *Über Religion* and in the idea of a new mythology. Religion is considered primarily in terms of its social function – its political power of integration as well as its aesthetically constituting power. Religion thus conceived, however, ceases to have any philosophical-theological significance.

One of the advantages of such a new discipline of philosophy of religion by comparison with traditional philosophical theology is that it does not have to ascertain at the outset, and by means of rational argument, the reality of its object, namely "religion." Further, via the path of religion as a given phenomenon, it can turn to the thought of God. The problem is here that if this new discipline does not take the idea of God merely empirically, it nevertheless seems still to have need of that rational philosophical theology, to the demise of which it owes its existence. If this new discipline does indeed speak of God, it can as little ascertain God's existence as can philosophical theology. Leaving to one side later developments in the direction of an atheistic critique of religion and an empirical science of religion, the only solution here seems to be a change of the concept of God. Hegel's philosophy of religion can be read as pursuing such a change. His philosophy of religion is also a philosophy of religion after the death of God – i.e. after the death of the personal God of traditional philosophical theology as well as of traditional religion. Religion is no longer defined as the relation to something divine external to religion itself, but it

is the self-consciousness of spirit. This solution is more than just a consideration of religion as a spiritual-cultural phenomenon; it still remains a kind of philosophical theology – though a philosophical theology for which the death of God – the old God – has paved the way.

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In “Kant on Religion in the Role of Moral Schematism,” Martin Moors shows that Kant developed his philosophy of religion according to a double-sided methodology: on the one hand, a scholastic sense, on the other, a cosmo-political sense. Both perspectives have relevance for Kant’s philosophy of religion. With respect to religion in the scholarly sense, philosophy plays a critical role. It determines the place and function of religion within a scientific system, and in so far as it draws certain limits, it restricts religion’s claim to truth. By contrast, religion in the cosmo-political sense has a bearing on Kant’s philosophy of hope. In Kant’s view of hope both theoretical and practical interests of reason are brought together. Religion can offer some answer to the question as to what human beings can hope for. In this context religion is not limited by critical reason; rather it confronts human reason with its own finitude.

Moors’ thesis is that Kant, at several structural moments, deploys his theory of schematism in order to give a rational footing to this idea of religion. Kant does indeed determine the essence of religion in a merely functional way: religion is a function of moral schematism. Thus Kant opens three possibilities which grant religion its proper truth and essence within the realm of pure practical reason. These possibilities are concerned with three moments of finitude of which Kant speaks in these terms: 1) an analytic of finitude in which the moral law is presented, especially in connection with the moral constraint that is particular to this law (duty); 2) a dialectic of finitude, in which the idea of the highest good is presented; and 3) the drama of finitude, in which is presented the battle of the good against the evil principle for dominion over the human being. On three occasions, defined in terms of the finite situation of our practi-

cal reason, morality leads inevitably to religion, or, more precisely put, to the religious affirmation that there is a God.

Concerning the limitations of reason, Moors stresses that these limits are not intrinsic to reason itself but to the fact that practical reason must deal with sensibility to realize its natural end, and this makes the use of a schematism necessary. In the *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* this schematism is provided by the doctrine of the types which operates on an objectively logical level. But according to Moors, still another schematism is needed that would operate on the subjectively logical level. The definition of this type is concerned only with an intellectual representation of the universal lawfulness of nature according to which the law of freedom might be realized in *concreto*. Duty, however, is to be realized practically and thus it confronts practical reason with its incapacity and finitude. It is religion, Moors claims, which allows Kant to offer a moral schematism on subjectively logical grounds.

With regard to the *analytic* of finitude, Moors introduces religion as an answer, on merely subjective grounds, to the need we have to make moral constraint intuitive to ourselves. By thinking moral obligation as the content of God's will, duty reveals in itself a momentum of finitude.

With regard to the *dialectic* of finitude, Moors refers to the impossibility of human reason being the cause of the synthesis of morality and happiness. Hence arises the need for a postulate of the existence of God, of a supreme cause of nature which possesses a causality corresponding to moral intentions. Only through religion is it possible to realize the harmony of my will with that of a holy and beneficent author of the world.

With regard to the *drama* of finitude, Moors draws attention to the finitization of human reason, in that there seems to be some perverting conflict between two moral incentives, namely, the moral law and the law of self-love. Moral religion is introduced by Kant in terms of its power to restore our original disposition to the good. Moors refers here to Kant's philosophical Christology. For Kant Jesus Christ objectively represents the functional meaning of the original

model. Taken subjectively Jesus Christ becomes a working exemplar who functions to make the idea of a human being morally pleasing to God into a model for all human beings. Thus this moral Christo-centered religion is assigned the role of a schematic mediation.

Moors concludes by affirming that for Kant the depths of a finite human mind supply the philosophical coordinates in which the life of the human soul is enacted, both in theoretical and moral interests. This finitude manifests itself in three different shapes: 1) in the definition of moral obligation; 2) in the idea of the possibility of the unconditioned totality of the object of pure willing; 3) in the representation of the combat which a person should undertake against the impulses of radical evil within himself. With regard to these three considerations, religion has a role to play in terms of its schematizing function

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In his discussion of Fichte's *Versuch einer Kritik aller Offenbarung* Daniel Breazeale focuses on Fichte's theory of the postulates of reason and their relation to the concept of revelation. He offers a critical evaluation of this text, stressing less its Kantian roots as the more original, in some cases, pre-critical features of Fichte's theory of revelation.

The *Versuch* is an effort to show that certain religious concepts are rationally justifiable, albeit not by purely theoretical or speculative reason. In line with Kant, Fichte deduces the idea of God as something we simply must presuppose as a condition for achieving practical reason's final purpose, namely, the highest good. As for freedom, however, Fichte refuses to consider it as a postulate of reason. It is an original datum in its own right: not a postulate but a premise.

The first postulate Fichte deduces is that of the "causality of the moral law in all reasonable beings." From this immediately postulated causality of the will it is but a short step to the postulate of God's existence. Also immortality is deduced. What is characteristic of these postulates is their certainty. As compared to the moral law, however, which is

immediately certain, they remain theorems and, as such, can never be practically binding upon anyone. The postulates are only subjectively necessary.

Making the link with religion, Fichte claims to show how the latter has the function of giving sensible expressions to practical reason's deepest and purest certainties. All human beings require some such assistance and therefore religion is a universal phenomenon. Such a universal religion can be called natural religion. Religion, however, can also address itself to the particular needs, or rather to the specific moral weaknesses of particular individuals, peoples, and ages. To address these needs is the distinctive task of revealed religion. Fichte's ambition is to deduce the possibility of such a revelation by showing that our interpreting a phenomenon as a revelation is only warranted when the content conveyed by the putative revelation is the moral law and its postulates.

Moreover, the *a priori* deduction of revelation concerns only its possibility. The concrete application of it requires an additional act of reflective judgment, in which one evaluates a particular appearance in the light of the general concept of revelation.

Finally, revelations do not have any objective validity. Their validity is purely subjective. This is also the case with the ideas of reason affirmed in the postulates, but the latter possess a degree of certainty, universality and necessity absent in the concept of revelation. Breazeale stresses the fact that there is some ambiguity in Fichte's notion of subjectivity. Both the postulates and revelation are subjective in so far as they are mere ideas, ultimately grounded by reflection upon the highest principles of subjectivity (freedom and the moral law). Revelation, however, is also subjective in two additional senses: first, an actual revelation is always a sense experience and as such will vary from circumstance to circumstance; second, it is only valid for some, not for all human beings. Though Fichte stresses the distinction between these two forms of belief, Breazeale shows the difficulties inherent in their distinction. He stresses the un-Kantian or pre-Critical assumptions connected with Fichte's distinction. He claims that Fichte's thinking "was still marked by

vestiges of dogmatic rationalism and that he had not yet fully absorbed the lessons of the Copernican revolution in philosophy nor grasped all the implications of Kant's redefinitions of 'reason' and of 'objectivity.'"

Breazeale's thesis is that Fichte's did not purely deduce postulates nor revelation from the pure will. Both deductions appear to involve an empirical as well as an a priori claim. But Breazeale's criticism goes even further. He denies the truth of the empirical premise by pointing to the possibility of a sceptical or ironic attitude, or even one of existential revolt or tragic resignation towards the existence of God, without thereby giving up the striving to determine one's will freely in accord with the moral law. Breazeale's point is that this is a question that can be answered only by an appeal to human experience and not by means of a priori philosophical speculation.

Also the distinction between theoretical and practical reason made by Fichte in his *Versuch* is not acceptable for Breazeale: he doubts whether it is possible to make sense of a purely practical affirmation of the reality of anything. Thus Fichte's unsuccessful efforts in the *Versuch* to distinguish the concept of revelation from the ideas of reason seems to put into question the whole theory of the postulates of critical reason, and in particular the dichotomy between theoretical and practical reason as well as the relationship between the realms of freedom and nature. As a result Breazeale concludes by offering a correction of Fichte's *Versuch* in the line of the later *Wissenschaftslehre*. But here he also asks ironically whether such a *Wissenschaftslehre* can be more than just "wishful thinking."

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In his contribution, "Faith and Pure Insight in Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes*," Ludwig Heyde describes the struggle between faith and the Enlightenment as developed by Hegel in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. He stresses the surprising result that, in the end, the conception of God possessed by faith hardly differs from the deism of the Enlightenment. Heyde believes that the logic of the struggle

between these two has some relevance for a systematic philosophical reflection on the relation between faith and reason. He also thinks that it can provide a hermeneutical key in the critical appraisal of contemporary views about human finitude and its relation to the absolute.

According to Hegel, faith is the form religion takes within a world in which spirit is alienated. In such a world political power and wealth have become the highest values, though also at the same time they appear to be utterly vain. Faith is both a protest against this alienated world and an expression of it. By way of protest against the lack of substantiality of this world, faith flees to a world "beyond" this one. However, faith remains separated from the world towards which it is in flight. Thus it appears as an uninsightful faith totally opposed to an unfaithful insight claiming to be the pure insight of the Enlightenment. This insight is also a critique of the alienated world, but as the contrary to faith, what is at stake for it is not the content of the world but the form. Here also the spirit elevates itself above the actual world but now through the activity of critical thought itself. Decisive is not *what* is thought but *that* one thinks. The Enlightenment objects that faith is concerned with an alien reality, something irrational and contrary to rational insight. However, Heyde argues, this reproach to faith is the result of a misunderstanding of the genuine character of religious faith. Nevertheless, it is effective because faith itself suffers from a similar misunderstanding of the true nature of religion. Thus the critique of the Enlightenment appears to be a misunderstanding of a misunderstanding. Both faith and Enlightenment are determined by the same logic of the understanding in which the finite and the infinite, nature and supernature, earth and heaven, immanence and transcendence exclude each other.

On the one hand, the Enlightenment reproaches faith for being concerned with an absolute "other," alien to self-consciousness, presented to it by mendacious priests. On the other hand, it declares the object of faith to be produced by consciousness itself. As a consequence of this Enlightenment criticism, faith becomes anxious about forms of anthropomorphism and purifies God of all his predicates,

thereby reducing God to an empty, indeterminate transcendence, similar to the deistic God of the Enlightenment. Faith becomes itself an Enlightenment, though an unsatisfied one, given that it is nostalgic for what it feels has been lost. In this way faith prepares its own downfall, entering into the logic of its opponent and destroying the dialectic of the finite and the infinite, essential to religion. Heyde's conclusion stresses the fact that when we think of God and religion in the manner shared by both faith and Enlightenment a fruitful thinking of God is blocked.

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Stephen Houlgate offers an exploration entitled "Religion, Morality and Forgiveness in Hegel's Philosophy," in which he argues that for Luther and Hegel religion is more than an instrument of moral education as it is for Kant and Nietzsche. Like Luther, Hegel's religious position is post-moral. Though religion, and particularly the Christian religion, presuppose that we first recognize moral obligations, its basic content is not to be reduced to that. Houlgate starts with Hegel's interpretation of the myth of the Fall. According to Hegel, the Fall is not to be considered as a morally evil act, but first of all as indicating the fact that human beings must leave their natural state: they should be conscious, free and responsible beings. As soon as they recognize this, they become moral beings, imputable and capable of doing evil. In that sense, the Fall is a fall into morality, and therefore also into sin. For Hegel knowledge, the result of eating from the tree, divides us from God by making us ashamed of our naturalness and conscious of our separate identity; at the same time, it unites us with God by allowing us to share God's own understanding of good and evil.

Hegel believes that Christianity requires that we become moral beings, if we are to become fully human. We must learn the difference between good and evil and accept that we have a duty to do what is good. We must also accept that we are responsible for our actions and must take the blame when we fail to do what is good. Yet, pace Nietzsche and Kant, Christianity, for Hegel, does not establish morality as

the supreme authority in our lives. Indeed, Christian faith is the belief that the demands of morality can be fulfilled only if morality does not reign supreme. Faith asserts that we can become loving beings only if we stop trying to love through our own moral efforts alone and let ourselves be taken over by the Holy Spirit. It also asserts that we can become loving beings only if we accept that we are not subject to absolute, irrevocable moral condemnation, but are forgiven when we go wrong. Christian faith, Houlgate concludes, is the belief that we meet the demands of morality most adequately when we become post-moral children of God.

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Stephen Houlgate's exploration is followed by Sander Griffioen's reflection on "Hegel's Philosophy of Christian Religion Placed against the Backdrop of Kant's Theory of the Sublime." The leitmotiv of his discussion is that "the finite does not hinder." According to Griffioen, a basic element in Hegel's philosophy of incarnation is that finitude cannot hinder human beings from reaching their destiny.

Referring to an important text of Hegel about Incarnation, Griffioen tries to show that death is not the end of life but rather a transition to spiritual presence, in which the finite is integrated, yet without vanishing, as it seems to do in the Spinozistic philosophy. In order to understand this move we need the Hegelian notion of sublation. However, to understand that the finite is sublated we must keep in mind that the finite refers both to human frailty in its externality as well as to the finite moment in the divine life itself. In so far as finitude refers to the first element, it is eliminated; in so far as it refers to the second, it is integrated. Both meanings are to be connected. Crucial is the fact that if the finite receives a justification as being sublated, it is so only in so far as it is "a vanishing moment."

In order to make clear Hegel's position vis-à-vis the meaning of Incarnation, Griffioen draws a parallel with Kant's *Kritik der Urteilkraft*. First, Kant stresses the inadequacy of the faculty of sense to grasp a given object as a

whole; and yet the human mind retains a sense of being called to overcome this condition. Second, Kant refers to the sublime in order to demonstrate our moral power. According to Griffioen, Hegel reads Incarnation as a spectacle in Kant's sense of the word. Its purpose is to demonstrate to the senses and the intuition that these faculties are inadequate. At the same time this spectacle elicits in the onlooker the inner assurance of his higher powers turning him into a participant of the spectacle.

When stressing that finitude is to be integrated into the movement of truth, Griffioen affirms that in a certain sense the integration is never complete. There always remains a remnant of un-integrated, brutal finitude which compels us to climb the ladder to the true standpoint again and again. This, he argues, is not just true of the many who need religion, but also of the philosopher.

Griffioen claims that German Idealism, be it Kantian or Hegelian, can only come to terms with the finite as a passing moment. The passing itself has little of the triumphant March of Mind with which Idealism is commonly identified. Griffioen suggests that Hegel's philosophy of the Christian religion and Kant's theory of the sublime try to answer the same question: how the painful experience of the inadequacy of finite modes of understanding can be combined with a joyful assurance as to what constitutes human dignity.

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In his discussion "Hegel on Reason, Faith and Knowledge" Tom Rockmore considers Hegel's contribution to the epistemological relation of faith and reason. He takes into consideration Hegel's position that faith is to be incorporated as a moment within reason. Reason indeed cannot demonstrate itself, but depends on faith in reason.

Thus Rockmore offers an epistemological approach to Hegel which is quite uncommon, since it is an approach more commonly found in the way Kant is read. Hegel distinguishes epistemological faith from religious faith, but sticks to faith in reason. He rejects religious faith because of his

rejection of a representational approach to knowledge (the so-called correspondence theory). But he rejects the idea of pure reason as defended by Kant as well. According to Hegel, it is not possible to elucidate the conditions of the possibility of knowledge in general for all rational beings. It is only possible to elucidate concrete conditions for finite human beings in a particular situation.

For Hegel, Rockmore argues, knowledge is the result of the objectivity and content which emerges from thinking. Knowledge claims are justified through their relation to spirit understood as an impure, situated, contextualized, historical form of reason. Claims are accepted or rejected through their coherence or lack of coherence to the more basic convictions present in the wider context at a given historical moment. Connecting Hegel's view of knowledge with his conception of the spirit, Rockmore therefore defends a Hegelianism that is contextualist, relativist and historicist. Especially the contextualist character of Hegel's position brings him close to that of Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein, however, did not go as far as to link contextualism with history, whereas for Hegel they are inseparable. Rockmore himself considers the Hegelian standpoint to be the correct one.

Hegel, he concludes, distinguishes between epistemological faith and reason. Like Kant, he isolates reason from religious faith, but he does not isolate it from faith as such. Hegel understands that the most promising approach to knowledge lies in a historicized form of contextualism. Since we cannot know that reason tells us the way the world is, and reason is our only epistemological tool, we must have epistemological faith in reason.

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The book concludes with a more general study by William Desmond concerning "Religion and the Poverty of Philosophy." Desmond's point of departure is the impression that philosophy can be quite a poor interpreter of religion by comparison with the richness of religion itself. However, he corrects this impression by pointing to the fact that the richness of religion itself is not separable from its sense of

its own poverty. "Religion," Desmond argues, "is richest when it confesses its poverty, just in relation to what exceeds all human efforts, religious or other." He suggests that something analogous might be said about philosophy as well.

Desmond thus explores the possibility of a philosophy of religion that would not understand itself as an endeavour to interpret, understand and judge religion. Instead of assuming that there is only a one-way intermediation of religion and philosophy (from religion to reason), he suggests that there might be a two-way communication between them. This two-way communication suggests that philosophy accept its own poverty and seems to be beyond the scope of Hegel's of absolute knowing. Desmond does not want to argue against knowing, but he wants to put it within certain limits. In the line of Cusanus he stresses the fact that, at certain limits, one knows that one does not know. He examines the possibility of an other knowing that may resurrect our mindfulness of what was most energetically intimate to faith. Faith seems to ask for a knowing that is different from both a "monstrous" instrumental reason and from an ambitious idealistic, Hegelian reason, since both turn out to be forms of reason that is only interested finally in mediating with itself. Desmond, by contrast, refers to the biblical idea of becoming "poor in spirit." He asks for a "saving knowing" that would be concerned with more than mediating with itself.

Faith, Desmond admits, seeks understanding because of its intrinsic claim to being rational in some way. However, he argues, there remains some indeterminate dimension within religion or faith that cannot be grasped by reason, but which in a sense might be considered not as a poverty as compared to the determinacy of philosophical reason, but rather as an "overdeterminacy of the indeterminate in the surplus of its transcendence as other." Here Desmond refers to an elemental conception of faith as confidence or fidelity. Instead of taking the standpoint of philosophy whereby it considers itself as almost self-evidently superior to faith, Desmond asks whether philosophy is not seeking the other to itself, trying to think what is other to thought thinking

itself. Instead of scientific understanding, Desmond suggests, we need a new reverence, and perhaps a new kind of saving knowing.

Desmond thus opposes himself to the Kantian and Hegelian traditions both of which have the tendency to expel the other and leave no room for saving knowledge. Saving knowing is termed by Desmond as "an understood and affirmed intermediation, binding the singular self, the communal and the divine; and it is enacted dramatically both in the religious mimetics that are the rituals or sacraments of a community, and in living itself in the configurations of ethical life that embody our willingness to participate in saving, and this by keeping and realizing properly, the promise of our being." Whereas Hegel claims that philosophy has a richer form than religion and thus supersedes it, Desmond suggests that religious reverence lives more intimately with the primal confidence and that it is more faithful to the origin than philosophy. Therefore the religious double as "*Vorstellung*" might be a truer image of the living, true One, just in keeping open the reference to transcendence as Other. "Its power to keep open may be the essential poverty of the religious image, which just as poor, is the rich power to open up a way to transcendence, or for transcendence to come into the between, with no reduction of the otherness of transcendence. Thus the constitutive ambiguity of the religious image would not be a defective poverty, but an effective one, and therefore a rich poverty."

Thus philosophy appears to be poor as compared to the poverty of religion. This "poverty of philosophy" brings Desmond to the Marxist position which univocally reduces the equivocality of the Hegelian position by negating any kind of transcendence, in the direction of an entirely humanistic position. Marxism considers God to be the false double of humanity, humanity which constitutes the true One. True humanity must be redeemed from God as the false double. The saving knowing of philosophy now seems to consist in our being redeemed *from* God.

Desmond, however, argues that philosophy here risks merely recreating itself as the false double of God. He points towards a different reading of the poverty of philosophy, fo-

cusing on reverence as being crucial for philosophy itself, as well as for religion. Religion can be thought of as rich in reverence, thus can be seen as closer to the primal reverence for the origin out of which determinate religions and philosophies take more definite form. According to Desmond, there is an inward otherness, a “more,” to thinking itself that is not completely self-mediated in this or that form of determinate mindfulness. Desmond’s point is that religions are often closer to acknowledging this more primal “more;” this links religion to art, which also seems to share the same reverence for this “more.” And he suggests that philosophy should learn to recognise its debts to “secret others,” seeking for a new confidence, in the face of the loss of confidence typical of nihilism. Instead of the Hegelian absolute knowing which is a knowing that claims no longer to feel the need to go beyond itself, Desmond proposes a knowing that knows that it must exceed itself into what is beyond it, precisely because what originates it is always beyond it.

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PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION AFTER THE DEATH OF GOD

WALTER JAESCHKE

1. The Crisis of Philosophical Theology

(1) “God is dead” – Hegel’s catchphrase allows us to intimate the deep caesura that separates modern thought from the philosophical theology of early modernity, as well as other preceding epochs. The suggestive plenitude of that catchphrase, however, easily leads to the oversight, enforced through its later repetition by Nietzsche,¹ that these words are not intended to be a definitive statement about the advent of an event. For Hegel, they signify the formula for the sentiment, “upon which the religion of more recent times rests.” Its provocative meaning lies in the reference to the necessity to understand the thought of the infinite pain which this sentiment expresses, as a moment of the highest idea – and hence as a moment of the absolute: the necessity to confer upon it a “philosophical existence” which constitutes the precondition for the resurrection of the thought of the absolute.²

The sentiment, “God is dead,” even if at first a particular sentiment, permeated all domains of spiritual life at the time – the arts, religion and also philosophy. From the perspective of the history of philosophy (and it is only that perspective which concerns us here), the all-pervasive state of affairs that Hegel designates – probably in reference to the cultural atmosphere of his time – as that “sentiment,” “upon which the religion of more recent times rests” may be understood as the outcome of the critique of the preceding phi-

¹ Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1882, ²1887) 3. Buch, Nr. 125.

² Cf. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Glauben und Wissen* (1802). *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 4, hrsg. von H. Buchner und O. Pöggeler (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag 1968) 413 f.

losophical theology in the form in which it unintentionally emerged at the end of the Enlightenment. As a provocatively formulated diagnosis of the crisis of philosophical theology, nevertheless for this diagnosis a therapy still appears to yield promising prospects. The sentiment of the death of God is the symptom of a disease that is brought to our attention by that very diagnosis. In contrast to its literal meaning, it does not pronounce the irreversible occurrence of death, but it characterizes the mood of those, who, on the basis of the portents of disaster that they have already beheld, have reconciled themselves with this event before it actually took place, and without contemplating a remedy.

(2) The then current crisis of philosophical theology may have appeared to many contemporaries as an unexpected event, which seemingly befell them from out of the blue – or, put more accurately, as an event evoked by the “all destroyer” (*Alleszermalmer*) Kant³ through his solitary theoretical venture, for which crisis he should consequently also take the blame. And yet we are aware, and this not merely from the more recent history of the sciences, that such leaps in the development of thought have usually already been prepared by a long development – and that, although they may indeed be occasioned by external critique, they are not, in their entirety, caused by the same. Otherwise the critique would not even receive the attention of its contemporaries.

The most profound reason for the crisis of philosophical theology lies in its internal constitution, to express the thought of God (*Gottesgedanke*) by means of reason. As such, it is subject to the conditions of rational cognition – and hence also to the conditions that Anselm of Canterbury expressed in the famous words, rarely grasped to their full extent, that God is to be thought as “*id quo maius cogitari nequit*.” Indeed with this turn of phrase Anselm did not merely present a hitherto unheard of, and, as is well known,

³ Moses Mendelssohn, *Morgenstunden oder Vorlesungen über das Dasein Gottes* (1785). *Gesammelte Schriften*, Jubiläumsausgabe, begonnen von I. Elbogen, J. Guttmann und E. Mittwoch, fortgesetzt von Alexander Altmann, Bd. 3.2 (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: frommann-holzboog 1974) 3.

subsequently on the whole contested, proof for God's existence. Probably unintentionally, he at the same time formulated a universal criterion by the aid of which one is able to test whether the thought of God is thought correctly – whether it is indeed God and not something else that is being thought. Ever since then, reason could not think of God as other than that, beyond which nothing higher can be thought. This criterion for the appropriateness of a thought as a thought of God, has, on the one hand, contributed to the thought of God being elevated to previously unknown heights in the rational theology of the occident – from which I would not even exclude Aristotle. However, it also evoked a dynamism that explodes all formulations of the thought of God from the inside out. This subsequent internal development and explosion may briefly be demonstrated by three topics that constitute the historical and systematic preconditions of the philosophy of religion around 1800: by means of the topic “the person and attributes of God,” by that of “theodicy,” and the topic of “physico-theology.”

(3) The doctrines of physico-theology of rationalism – probably without exception – contain a chapter “De Deo,” in which a divine subject that is thought of as a person is presupposed, and determined in the assignation of the traditional attributes of God – hence in particular the attributes of goodness, justice, power and wisdom. The criterion of reason formulated by Anselm, of the rationally immanent necessity to think God as the upper-most high, equally exacts the thought of His attributes “in gradu absolute summo.” However, from this increase there results an inevitable incompatibility of these attributes, even if this is insistently verbally denied by rational theology. Even if – as positive predicates – these predicates appear to be formally reconcilable, in their highest degree they enter into an opposition that cannot be compensated for by an assuaging, even ad-juring assurance of their compatibility. We are well aware, that goodness and justice, for example, as well as power and wisdom, are remarkably compatible, especially if one does not possess both qualities to a large degree. However, the degree to which either quality is increased, tends to be the same as that of the loss of the other – and there is no ra-

tional reason to assume that this would not be so in the case of their upper-most increase “in gradu absolute summo.” The God who is good to the highest degree is no longer just. Almost 2000 years ago now, it was for this reason that Marcion, therefore distinguished the good God (of the New Testament) from the just God (of Judaism) – rightly so from a conceptual standpoint, even if inopportune in terms of church-politics.

The crisis of theology – and certainly not only philosophical theology – appears much more conspicuously, also for a larger audience, in the topic of theodicy, i.e. the justification of God in the court of reason, given the presence of evil in the world. Experience is only able to make a modest – and in retrospect somewhat dubious – contribution to the defense. It may indeed be so, that there are more houses than prisons in the world,⁴ yet this may not be sufficiently convincing proof of God’s omniscience and omnipotence. This is where the inner dynamism of reason that was recognized by Anselm, leads to the irrefutable assumption, very expansively developed by Leibniz, that the all-good, all-just, omnipotent and omniscient God, could only have created the best of all possible worlds. Herewith is pronounced a stable, rationally necessitated nexus, between the concept of God and the concept of world, which can no longer be brought to a dissolution by later philosophical theology. The God who is thought of as being good, just, wise, and powerful to the highest degree, can only have created the best of all possible worlds. Anything else cannot be thought by reason. Of course, this nexus only exercises, for theology, its fortuitous effect, as long as the thought of God inherent therein, is not disputed; only then is it possible to draw conclusions about the constitution of the world from this nexus. Yet in view of the fact of evil in the world, the thrust of this argument reverses: An argument that draws conclusions about the con-

⁴ Cf. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Essais de Théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l’homme et l’origine du mal* (1710), nouvelle édition augmentée de l’histoire de la vie et des ouvrages de l’auteur par M. L. de Neufville. 2 vol. Edit. Louis de Jaucourt (Amsterdam: François Changuion 1734), cap. II, § 148.

stitution of the world from an assured thought of God, turns into an argument that, on the basis of the constitution of the world, is directed against either the act of creation by God, or against His attributes. The assessment of this world as the best of all possible ones, after all, arises exclusively from the rational determination of the thought of God. If, however, one has good reasons, or at least believes oneself to have such reasons, to assume that this world might not be the best of all possible worlds – and who does not! – then from this necessary tie of the thought of God to the thought of the world the inevitable conclusion arises, that this world could not be created by an all-good, all-just, omniscient and omnipotent God. Yet reason cannot think of any other God than such a God – at least if reason thinks of God as a personal God.

(4) In the 18th century physico-theology constituted an encompassing and influential movement in the knowledge of God from nature, significant in the history of theology as well as in that of the sciences. At the beginning of the century the triumphal refrain resounds ubiquitously – whether with regard to the measurement of the distances between fixed stars,⁵ or the enumeration of the intestinal muscles of the caterpillar of the Satin-moth⁶: “... and in this we recognize the immeasurable wisdom, power and goodness of the creator.” In the end Kant emphasizes an insight, in itself trivial, yet previously never drawn: based on the wisdom and goodness observable in creation, only a conclusion concerning the proportional wisdom and power of the creator is possible. Yet such a conclusion lags behind the dynamism inherent to the rationale of the thought of God: on the basis of the experience of worldly things no conclusions can be drawn about the wisdom and goodness of the act of creation “quo nihil maius cogitari possit” (or: “in gradu absolute summo”). Yet this gap between observable purposiveness and infinite wisdom does not only cause the ascent from

⁵ William Derham, *Astro-Theology or a Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God, from a Survey of the Heavens* (London 1715).

⁶ Pierre Lyonet, *Traité anatomique de la chenille, qui ronge le bois de saule* (La Haye: Gosse & Pinet 1762), 188 f, 497 and in particular 584.

this world to the thought of God, as intended by physico-theology's proof, to run aground. Here too the reversal of the direction of the conceptual nexus is much more severe; observed reality may indeed support the thought of a wise and powerful Creator, but it denies the thought of an omnipotent and omniscient God. However, His all-goodness demands that He would also communicate goodness in His creation – the more so, since His omnipotence permits this.

In this respect the crisis of theodicy and the crisis of physico-theology coincide: the thought of God, the determinations of which reason is not at liberty to think, must be elevated by that very reason to such an extent, that it is no longer possible to think it as congruent with the experience of our reality. The concept-formation necessary to reason, the inflation of its concepts beyond all potential restrictions inevitably leads to demands that reason is no longer able to relinquish, yet which cannot be met by any finite reality. In this respect the crisis of philosophical theology is properly speaking the crisis of a reality that does not satisfy thought.

(5) This critique arising from the innermost dynamism of philosophical theology is joined by an external critique, mainly associated with Kant, yet equally rich in antecedents, a critique of the conclusiveness of the proofs of God's existence developed in philosophical theology, in particular a critique of the cosmological and ontological proof of God's existence. These proofs are not the miserable excrescences of a hybrid urge for demonstration that should and could best be forgotten – at least once evidence of their failure has been supplied. Rather, they are indispensable to philosophical theology, since, after all, it is based on the thought of God and not on the traditional accounts of His historic efficacy and revelatory activity. Existence is always already analytically inherent in the religious accounts of the factual revelatory actions of God – or, at the least, so it is assumed. A thought projected by reason, in contrast, must first have its existence secured by means of processes controlled by reason.

Little solace is offered by the fact that the critique of the forms of the proofs of God's existence possible in principle – the ontological, the cosmological and the natural – would at

the same include the impossibility of the proof of the non-existence of God. For one thing, this does not follow from Kant's immanent critique of the proofs of God's existence, but rather at best from his transcendental-philosophical approach, to which one also has to take recourse in order to partake of this immunization. Further more, not much is gained conceptually. If God's existence does not permit demonstration by the means of philosophical theology, then this theology cannot ascertain the existence of its primary subject at all. It is then merely the rational science of an object the existence of which is problematic – as such not in any way different from rational psychology. What is more, the problematic of compatibility raises severe doubts as to the existence of that object: its very concept is inherently contradictorily constituted.

Towards the end of the 18th century the objections that here have been sketched briefly – and in preparation of what is to come – add up to the result that contemporaries have subsumed under the telling title “Atheism of theoretical reason”⁷ – and with this the conceptual content of the words of the death of God are circumscribed. At the time this experience is indeed to be understood as one of resignation: it has nothing of the triumphant demeanor that Nietzsche displays a century later – and in any case, it is not a secret, that even in Nietzsche this demeanor is not as thoughtlessly triumphant as it is often perceived to be.⁸

2. From Philosophical Theology to Philosophy of Religion

The profound crisis of philosophical theology – the “atheism of theoretical reason,” the sentiment that “God is dead” – at the end of the Enlightenment does not yet produce a result with which contemporaries could have taken satisfaction. To

⁷ Karl Heinrich Heydenreich, “Atheismus der theoretischen Vernunft,” in: *Briefe über den Atheismus* (Leipzig: Martini 1796).

⁸ This is already demonstrated in the aphorism referred to in the first footnote.

take note of this result and to look for a way out was – at that time – one and the same. However, this quest leads in different directions, and not yet at all in the direction of a replacement of philosophical theology by a philosophy of religion, or even its recoinning (*Umprägung*) into a philosophy of religion.⁹

In what follows I wish to mention three of those options specific to the time – and to preclude a fourth one from my considerations: namely the surrender of a revision of philosophical theology, and – in connection with this – the unconditional retreat into positive religion, such as it is executed under the title of a transition of philosophy to non-philosophy (and that means into positive religion).¹⁰ With such a retreat one leaves the domain of rational theology or, philosophy of religion, which is to be our theme. Furthermore, such a retreat does not offer many prospects in a situation, which, also beyond philosophical theology, is characterized by a two-fold erosion. First, by the insight into the possibility of abandoning religion in the establishment of a political or moral order, yes, even the insight into the good reasons for such an abandonment, and the ensuing retreat of religion into the lamplight of the private; and secondly,

⁹ Konrad Feiereis, *Die Umprägung der natürlichen Theologie in Religionsphilosophie. Ein Beitrag zur deutschen Geistesgeschichte des 18. Jahrhunderts*. [The rededication of natural theology to philosophy of religion. A contribution to the history of the German humanities in the 18th century] Erfurter theologische Studien, Bd. 18 (Leipzig: St. Benno Verlag 1965). – This important book is clearly not known well enough. Only the conceptualization of the then current philosophical theological problematic, that is to say the problematic of the philosophy of religion, as a “rededication” rather than as a “replacement,” appears problematic in my view.

¹⁰ Carl August Eschenmayer, *Die Philosophie in ihrem Übergang zur Nichtphilosophie* [Philosophy in its transition to Non-philosophy] (Erlangen: Walther 1803). – The use of the term “non-philosophy” or “a-philosophy” [*Unphilosophie*] demonstrates an accordance with Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi’s open letter “Jacobi an Fichte” [Jacobi to Fichte] (1799), which, however, moves on an incomparably higher level of thought. Cf. *Transzendentalphilosophie und Spekulation. Der Streit um die Gestalt einer Ersten Philosophie (1799-1807)*, Quellenband, hrsg. von W. Jaeschke (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag 1993) 6.

erosion through the destruction of the traditional pillars of this religion: that of inspiration, the veracity of scripture, the questioning of tradition in Protestant thought, and finally also that of history in the sense of a provable facticity.

The philosophical options most readily available at the time, consist of strategies for a new-conceptualization of philosophical theology, strategies that sail around the cliffs on which rationalist approaches ran aground. If it proves impossible to think the *foregoing* thought of God by means of the *foregoing* philosophical theology, or even to recognize that God with the conceptualization of a rationalistic philosophical theory, then three options offer themselves: (1) the modification of the foregoing thought of God corresponding to the intellectual potential of the philosophical concept; (2) the modification of the foundational strategies of the foregoing philosophical theology; (3) the modification of the thought of God and the method. These three options culminate in the three immense, epochal “points of contention” (*Streitsachen*) of the period around 1800: pantheism, atheism, and theism.

(1) Jacobi had poignantly and persistently driven home to his contemporaries the point that a demonstrative rational philosophy would, contrary to its own understanding, not arrive at the God of theism, but necessarily at the God of pantheism (if not atheism). In the aftermath of the contention with regard to pantheism that Jacobi evoked, Neo-Spinozism, starting with Lessing and Herder, extending until Romanticism, rapidly gained ground, instead of withering away unmasked. Lessing’s pronouncement “The orthodox concepts of divinity are not for me, I cannot enjoy them,”¹¹ as Jacobi also concedes, is no exception at that time, but the conviction of many, and especially so among the ranks of the “foremost thinkers” (*ersten Geistern*¹²) – which, coincidentally, to some extent included Jacobi himself.

¹¹ Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *Werke*, hrsg. von K. Hammacher und W. Jaeschke, Bd. 1, hrsg. von K. Hammacher und I.-M. Piske (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag 1998) 16 (in the following abbreviated as JWA).

¹² JWA 91.

This result, which Jacobi did not intend, certainly did not occur by accident: If reason is not able to think the God of theism, but is instead able to think a God that is to be understood as “*hen kai pan*,” then this is at least a plausible occasion for calling into question the traditional thought of God, rather than reason. This also follows from the peculiar constitution of reason that Hegel later expressed as follows: If reason deems itself to be convinced of a state of affairs, it is futile to wish to distance oneself from that insight, and to wish something else to be true. Whatever else reason might mean, at least it means this: an internal conviction that leaves no room for divergent convictions. To allow Hegel to speak once more, “[reason], like God, does not want any foreign gods before it, and least of all, above it.”¹³

(2) The second option consists of the retention of the theistic thought of God at the cost of abandoning the instruments of traditional philosophical theology. Hence it consists of the replacement of the means of theoretical reason by the means of practical reason, that is, the transition from rational or physico-theology to an ethical theology. It is the transition to the new foundation of an at least rudimentary philosophical theology, by taking recourse to the conditions of validity of the moral-law, the inner unity of practical reason. In so doing, the concept that Kant’s contemporaries first referred to as “philosophy of religion” is thematized. The term itself is indeed already claimed earlier, namely for the first time in 1772, by Sigismund v. Storchenau.¹⁴ Carl Leonhard Reinhold seizes upon the term and introduces it in the debate concerning Kant’s doctrine of postulates, yet he still uses the term rather vaguely – not yet in the con-

¹³ G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, Bd. 1: *Einleitung in die Geschichte der Philosophie*. *Orientalische Philosophie*, hrsg. von P. Garniron und W. Jaeschke (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag 1994) 304, cf. 337 (= Hegel: *Vorlesungen*. Bd. 6). [A note to the English reader: The source for this quote is the lecture manuscript from 1827/28, English translations of Hegel’s *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* are not based thereon]

¹⁴ For the following references about the history of the concept cf. by the author the entry on “*Religionsphilosophie*” in: *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Bd. 8 (Basel: Schwabe Verlag 1992) 748–763.

temporary sense of a philosophy that has religion as its object, but in the sense of “a doctrine of religion by philosophical means” (Religionslehre mit philosophischen Mitteln): and hence to refer to an endeavor that uses the means of philosophy to deal with objects that are also topics of religion; namely the person of God and the immortality of the soul. In that sense, the title “philosophy of religion” could already have designated the rational theology of the Enlightenment. That Kant no longer deals with the topics mentioned in the same manner as traditional rational or physico-theology and rational psychology, is not evident from Reinhold’s use of the term. Critics of Kant, such as the friends of Jacobi, Matthias Claudius and Johann Friedrich Kleuker, have, for that very reason, rejected the term “philosophy of religion” in the interests of religion. Of its objects – God and immortality – no philosophy could at all be possible, a so-called philosophy of religion would merely lead astray.

In spite of such qualms the term “philosophy of religion” quickly caught on in the 1790’s in the conditions of the crisis of philosophical theism. As of 1793 the first books start to appear with the title “Philosophy of religion.” Indeed the term does not yet occur in Kant’s monograph *Religion within the Bounds of Pure Reason*, nevertheless Kant’s monograph is the first to do justice to the conceptual content of the new term, in so far as it does not primarily envisage the thought of God, but religion as a social phenomenon. As its decisive contribution I wish to emphasize the close connection between Kant’s purely moral concept of God, and his purely moral interpretation of religion. If the philosophical access to the thought of God is opened up purely by means of ethics, and to the conscious exclusion of other aspects, and if this philosophical thought of God is supposed to be nothing other than the thought of the God of religion, then religion must also be interpreted purely in moral terms. Indeed, what is at play is a mutual exchange, on the one hand the moral concept of God is measured against religion, and on the other hand it is the interpretation of religion from the perspective of that concept. Here the proper initiative and foundational achievement, however, does not belong to religion, but to the concept of God of ethical theology. Religion

confirms this concept only to the extent that it is previously subjected to moral interpretation and purification – going as far as the exorcism of anything that is not moral. Philosophy of religion is here not a discipline independent of an ethico-theologically constituted philosophical theology, rather it is subject in its entirety to ethical theology.

However, this first form of a mutual relationship between a modified philosophical theology and a philosophy of religion, only lasts a few years. Decisive for its rapid demise – in spite of Schelling's verbose aversion to it – is not so much the theological exploitation of Kant's doctrine of postulates that immediately ensued at the time, an exploitation in the interests of a reconstruction of those objects, that, Hegel too, for example, had already thought to have been destroyed in the "conflagration of dogmatism" (*Feuersbrunst der Dogmatik*).¹⁵ Rather what is decisive are the conceptual shortcomings in Kant's exposition of ethical theology. Fichte had sought to avoid the shortcomings of the doctrine of postulates and to further think out ethical theology. He did not conceive of the moral world-order as something on the basis of which one could draw conclusions about God – God as the condition of non-contradiction of practical reason – but he thought of that world-order as God: "we do not require any other God, and we cannot grasp any other."¹⁶ With that proposal, however, Fichte initiated the strife concerning atheism. With that strife the first link between an ethico-theological concept of God and a moral interpretation of religion comes to an end.

(3) The third option to overcome the crisis of philosophical theology should here only be mentioned briefly, since – much like the first – it bears no relation to the philosophy of

¹⁵ Cf. the letter from Hegel to Schelling, end January 1795, in: *Briefe von und an Hegel*, hrsg. von J. Hoffmeister, Bd. 1 (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag 1969) 17.

¹⁶ Johann Gottlieb Fichte: "wir bedürfen keines andern Gottes, und können keinen andern fassen." In: *Ueber den Grund unsers Glaubens an eine göttliche WeltRegierung* (1798), in: *J.G. Fichte-Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, hrsg. von R. Lauth und H. Gliwitzky, Abt. I, Bd. 5 (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt 1977) 354.

religion. As an example thereof I would like to forward Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift*. Here Schelling has in view in particular the topic that has previously been sketched as the second objection to philosophical theology: the problem of theodicy. In contrast to the "tepid theism" (*schalen Theismus*) of his contemporaries, he attempts a philosophical reinstitution of a theism, which does not succumb to the arguments that are nourished by the problem of theodicy: the existence of evil in the world does not constitute a conclusive objection against the thought of an all-good omnipotent God, if one thinks into the thought of God itself the difference between the ground of its existence, namely nature in God, and His existence. Only then is evil, indeed, a metaphysical reality (and not merely privation), but it is then not something external to God, which would be opposed to him in the manner of a metaphysical dualism, and neither is it one of its creatures. However, this – strategically plausible – re-determination of the thought of God elicited the massive protest of Jacobi, and therewith triggered the third contention, the "contention concerning the divine things," in which the concept of theism itself now is contentious.

Not only Schelling's solutions with regard to the concept of God, as well as the concept of evil and the concept of freedom, appear problematic to me, but also an aspect for which Jacobi in his attacks on Schelling did not display any interest: namely the question as to the method by means of which Schelling carries out his distinctions and so diligently exposes all the details of the inner life of God. Jacobi's friend Jakob Friedrich Fries did not incorrectly estimate this to be a regurgitation of the old fable of the primeval-bull (*Urstier*) and the moon-calf (*Mondkalb*)¹⁷ – and I second this opinion, even if I estimate Schelling's solution – to think the starting-point of the possibility of evil in God Himself – to be in principle the most promising step in the direction of the

¹⁷ Jakob Friedrich Fries, *Von deutscher Philosophie Art und Kunst. Ein Votum für Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi gegen F.W.J. Schelling* (Heidelberg: Mohr und Zimmer 1812) 71.

foundation of a form of theism in light of the problem of theodicy.

3. Unity of Philosophical Theology and Philosophy of Religion

(1) I just considered three forms of the reaction to the crisis of philosophical theology, which themselves still operate with the means of a reformed philosophical theology – even if Kant already anticipates a philosophy of religion from ethical theology. This philosophy of religion is, after all, still entirely subject to the predominance of ethical theology. Therefore there has not yet been any talk of philosophy of religion in the strict sense – which, seen from the perspective of the history of philosophy, also should not come as a surprise. One has to abstract from the differentiation of philosophy into its various disciplines that is current today, and keep in mind that “philosophy of religion” was not known to the canon of philosophy of the time, and that it equally does not constitute a theoretical option that, as it were, is present in potentia, and which merely needed to be actualized when required. It is only in the years that are under discussion here, that philosophy of religion is for the first time developed properly in alignment with Kant’s philosophy, as a discipline within philosophy – and this not merely as an accidental temporal alignment, but rather as a reaction to the problematic situation circumscribed by the words “the death of God.” As long as religion, in contrast, is considered to be effected by divine revelation, as the relationship between man and God as it is instituted by divine activity, religion does not constitute a genuine object of philosophy, let alone of a modern, rational philosophy. This claim can even be substantiated on a purely historical basis. Thinkers such as Hamann and Kleuker – who were indeed aware of the sentiment of “recent times” that “God is dead,” yet did not share it, but rather pitted themselves against it –

still, and for that very reason, strictly rejected such a philosophy of religion.¹⁸

(2) Religion only becomes the topic of philosophy once the self-evident recourse to a belief in God, whether it is biblically or philosophical-theologically grounded, has forfeited its indubitability, or, put differently, even if this might sound paradoxical: philosophy of religion as a philosophical discipline, only arises under the condition of the sentiment “God is dead.” This is a well documented and undeniable fact of the history of philosophy. The historical and systematic precondition for this new philosophy of religion lies in an interpretation of religion, which conceives of religion as a cultural phenomenon that is, at least for the most part, compatible with other forms of spiritual life. Only then can religion become the legitimate object of philosophy.

One may illustrate this, for example, with Schleiermacher’s speeches *On Religion (Reden über die Religion)*: they are addressed to *its cultured despisers (an die Gebildeten unter den Verächtern)* – and therefore already in the title make reference to the sentiment “God is dead.” They present religion as a cultural phenomenon, as a “view on the Universe” or as “a desire and taste for the infinite” as the well-known formulas go – and they explicitly call into question the concept of God.¹⁹ In a similar manner religion is at that time thematized in the sphere surrounding the attempts to institute a “new mythology”: they presuppose the rupture with the traditional constraint of philosophical theology as well as that of Christian religion, and deal with religion primarily in view of its social function – its political power of integration as well as its aesthetically constituting power. Christian religion may once again be included in these de-

¹⁸ Cf. the entry on “Religionsphilosophie,” see footnote 14.

¹⁹ Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion. Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* (1799). *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Abt. I, Bd. 2 (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter 1984) in particular “Zweite Rede. Über das Wesen der Religion,” 206-247. English translation *On Religion, Speeches to its cultured despisers*, trans. by J. Oman (New York: Harper and Row Publishers 1956) in particular “Second Speech” “The Nature of Religion,” 26-118.

liberations, as “Christian mythology” – yet already its principally equal standing with regards to other “mythologies” of antiquity and the orient, is indicative of the sentiment that Hegel conceptualized. As a phenomenon of this world religion is a potential, and certainly also an extraordinary, object of philosophy – at least of a philosophy which does not leave the recognition of that “which is most inherent in keeping the world together”²⁰ to magic, but makes this recognition its own agenda. This religion, however, no longer has any philosophical-theological significance.

One possible constituting factor for the compatibility of religion with other forms in this world is constituted at that time by the concept of reason. Kant’s interpretation of religion is based on the interpretation of religion by means of the concepts of practical reason; Hegel’s philosophy of religion later also sets itself the task to accentuate “reason in religion.”²¹ The range of meaning of the concept of reason allows for a number of different interpretations – ranging from a pronouncedly moral interpretation to an interpretation that ultimately anchors reason in religion, by arguing in that it is something human, and hence reason would also have to be in it.²²

(3) The extraordinarily systematic interest of philosophy in the new object religion initially arises from the quality proper to religion to put into question concepts of philosophy. Religion cannot relieve philosophy of the search for foundations. Yet it may function as a touchstone or corrective. This may be illustrated by the relationship of Hegel’s Bern period to Kant’s ethical theology – and in particular in

²⁰ Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Faust. Eine Tragödie*, Verse 382 f.; in: *Weimarer Ausgabe*, Abt. I, Bd. 14, p. 28: “was die Welt im Innersten zusammenhält”.

²¹ See by the author *Die Vernunft in der Religion. Studien zur Grundlegung der Religionsphilosophie Hegels* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: frommann-holzboog 1986).

²² G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, hrsg. von W. Jaeschke (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag 1983) 107 (=Hegel: *Vorlesungen*, Bd. 3).

Hegel's *Das Leben Jesu* [*Life of Jesus*].²³ The young Hegel recognizes that religion is not amenable to a purely moral interpretation – and this equally causes him to bid farewell to a moral concept of God to which he had previously adhered.²⁴ A state of affairs similar to that of the case of the history of the effect of Leibniz' *Theodicy* also applies here. Leibniz had tied the nexus between the thought of God and the interpretation of the world so tightly, that the interpretation of the world as the best possible one could be stabilized on the basis of the thought of God. Yet in a later countermove, the determination of the concept of God became questionable on the basis of the interpretation of the world. So now also the nexus between the moral concept of God and the concept of religion turns into an occasion to bid farewell to the moral concept of God. For when it becomes evident that religion persistently resists its complete transformation into a moral conceptualization, the purely moral concept of God becomes questionable in return. Hegel reverses the direction of the proof at first inherent in the connection between the thought of God and religion. He does not deduce the purely moral constitution of religion from a purely morally thought of God, but he disowns a purely moral thought of God on the basis of the factually impure moral constitution of religion. One cannot think the thought of God in purely moral terms, if religion cannot be interpreted in those terms.

(4) In view of the thematization of the thought of God the then novel philosophy of religion has a methodological advantage in contrast to traditional philosophical theology. It does not at first have to ascertain the reality of its object "religion" argumentatively, and it can, via the path of religion, turn to the thought of God. This advantage is, however, balanced by a severe disadvantage: So as not simply to gather the thought of God from religion quasi empirically, philoso-

²³ G.W.F. Hegel, *Das Leben Jesu* (1795). *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 1, hrsg. von F. Nicolin und G. Schüler (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag 1989) 205-278.

²⁴ This can be seen in his correspondence with Schelling at the beginning of 1795; cf. *Briefe von und an Hegel*, op. cit., 17 f. and 23 f.

phy of religion would require that very rational philosophical theology, to the demise of which it owes its existence. In that respect it offers no replacement for the loss of the philosophical-theological concept of God. It does indeed speak of God, but it can as little ascertain the existence of its object as can philosophical theology. From this point onwards one line of development leads to the critique of religion, and another leads to the empirical sciences of religion of the decades that follow.

(5) Philosophy of religion only receives a philosophical-theological significance on the condition of a change of the concept of God. This is the way that Hegel takes in his system. His philosophy of religion is also a philosophy of religion after the death of God – namely after the death of the personal God of traditional philosophical theology as well as of traditional religion. Hegel understands reality in its entirety as a process, which has altogether the structure of subjectivity.²⁵ The thought of the personality of God may indeed be an understandable anticipation – yet it is a bad anticipation that hinders an appropriate understanding of the thought of the subjectivity of the absolute. The realization of this absolute is designed for self-knowledge, the self-consciousness of spirit, and this systematically so, as well as historically, as the highest immanent telos of reality. Religion, therefore, is not the relation to something divine external to itself, but it is the self-consciousness of spirit. In religion it is known what Spirit is, and this Spirit is the highest form and goal, of reality.

That religion is in itself the self-knowing of the spirit, however, is not for itself. It still seeks to understand the divine in the form of an object for consciousness, and therefore also in the form of representation. However, what religion is only in itself, it is for philosophy of religion. It is the philosophy of religion that understands what religion is but yet does not think.

²⁵ See from the author “Substanz und Subjekt”, in: *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 62 (2000) 439-458.

A philosophy of religion that is conceptualized in this manner indeed also understands religion as a spiritual-cultural, and as a human phenomenon; yet at the same time it also understands religion as the self-consciousness of spirit. Therefore it is itself philosophical theology – that form of philosophical theology for which the death of God – the old God – has paved the way.

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KANT ON RELIGION IN THE ROLE OF MORAL SCHEMATISM

MARTIN MOORS

It is my contention that Kant has developed his philosophy of religion according to a double-sided methodology. In other words, whether his point of departure for determining the essence of philosophy and reason is viewed in a scholastic sense or in a cosmo-political sense, Kant can be interpreted as creating within his thought two different vantage points from which to think the essence of religion. When philosophy is taken in *sensu cosmico* – “a science of the reference of all cognition to the essential purposes of human reason”¹. – Kant brings to the fore the three famous questions: What can I know? What I ought to do? And what may I hope for?² In his *Logic*, Kant indicates that the third question in *sensu cosmico* will be answered by religion. In the theme of hope, both theoretical and practical interests of reason are brought together. In doing so, the problem of how a single final end of human reason orients the use of reason in general, will be cleared out (“a science of the highest maxim of the use of our reason”³).

¹ Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Riga: J.F. Hartknoch 1787) 867 [referred to as KrV, B with its corresponding pagination; citations of the English translation of the *First Critique* are taken from Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by W. Pluhar, introduction by P. Kitcher (Indianapolis, Cambridge: Hackett Publishing 1996)]. See also Kant’s *Logik. Kant’s gesammelte Schriften*, hrsg. von der königlich preußischen, später deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 1900sq.) Bd. 9, 24 [referred to as *Akad.-Ausg.* with its corresponding volume and pagination; citations from the English translations are taken from *Logic*, trans. with an introduction by R. Hartmann and W. Schwarz (New York: Dover Publications, 1974)].

² Cf. KrV, B 833.

³ *Akad.-Ausg.*, 9:24; trans. *Logic*, 28.

A philosophy of religion in *sensu cosmico* (taken as a philosophy of hope) has first to define the very nature of this final end ("All hoping aims at happiness"⁴). Consequently, such a philosophy of religion must indicate how this final end goes necessarily along with an affirmation of God. From a methodological point of view, such a philosophy has to assume a principle of teleology (*teleologia rationis humanae*). This principle connects the interests of reason to the Idea of absolute necessity⁵, which, according to Kant, is not anyhow conceivable by pure reason. With this Idea, we are faced with "the true abyss of human reason"⁶. Kant has methodologically speaking, in *sensu cosmico*, oriented his philosophy of religion on this rationally inconceivable Idea of God.⁷

There will thus be established a philosophy of religion in which it is not critical reason that is limiting the essence of religion. Rather, inversely, religion will in a *cosmo political* sense, now manifestly confront human reason with its finitude. Reflecting on the ultimate ground of unity between theoretical and practical reason, philosophy in *sensu cosmico* conceives this ground for human reason as "the true abyss (*Abgrund*)"⁸. Faced with the abysmal idea of the unconditioned necessity, philosophy in its perplexity opens for religion its true domain. "Beyond the limits of mere reason" philosophy of religion indicates the fact that all our rational comprehension of truth and goodness has finally to go over into a *thinking* on God, which is no longer a *comprehending*. Proceeding from this acknowledgement of finitude with regard to rational comprehension, philosophy makes possible the true thinking of the infinite. Irrespective of the requirements of a rational system, philosophy in *sensu cosmico*

⁴ KrV, B 833.

⁵ Cf. KrV, B 641.

⁶ KrV, B 641.

⁷ Cf. Georg Picht, *Kants Religionsphilosophie* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta 1985) 603-605. See also Onora O'Neill, "Innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft," in: *Kant über Religion*, hrsg. von F. Ricken/F. Marty (Stuttgart/Berlin/Köln: Verlag W. Kohlhammer 1992) 104.

⁸ KrV, B 641.

thinks the essence of religion located in this effort to relate the finite, the historical, the sensible to the infinite, the transhistorical, the noumenal.

In this article I want to show how Kant, also with regard to his idea of philosophy *in sensu scholastico*, hence from within the confines of a rational system, defines the essence of religion in accordance with this idea of religion. My thesis is that Kant, at several structural moments, deploys his theory of schematism in order to give this religious idea of religion a rational footing.

Philosophy and reason in a scholastic sense are interested in the completeness of a system of concepts and principles; this is the case in both the theoretical and practical fields of pure philosophy. Philosophical thought in this case follows as its regulative and normative ideal the *focus imaginarius* of a universal and necessary claim to truth. Thus, truth from this point of view, be it theoretical or practical/moral, is justifiable solely on the basis of principles of pure reason alone. "Philosophy, thus," says Kant, "is the system of philosophical cognitions or of cognitions of reason out of concepts. This is the *scholastic* (or school) *concept* of this science."⁹

With respect to religion and faith, this scholarly philosophy will play a critical role. More specifically, it exercises its critical powers in two related ways. First, scholarly philosophy is critical insofar as it aims at the determination of the place and function of religion within a scientific system; and second, this very same critical act of locating the proper place of religion also draws a limit, which restricts religion's claim to truth. Kant's famous formula, "within the boundaries of mere reason" expresses, as a critical program, his aim to determine both the place or function of religion and its restricting bounds of sense.

It is well-known that Kant, as a critical philosopher, attempts to locate truth and the essence of religion within the possibilities opened up by a system of pure practical philosophy. Kant states that we must "deny (*sublate*) knowl-

⁹ *Akad.-Ausg.*, 9:23; trans. *Logic*, Introduction, 27

edge, in order to make room for *faith (Glaube)*"¹⁰. Once religion, faith and revelation are thought within the confines of a critical program that systematically determines its place (function) and limit, the question arises as to which specific possibilities are opened within the requirements of a system of pure practical reason for granting religion its specific truth and essence.

In this paper, I will now inquire more closely into precisely these possibilities. I will argue that Kant, under the systematic requirements of his critical moral philosophy, determines the essence of religion in a merely functional way. More precisely, religion, understood within this critical-rational perspective, is defined by Kant as essentially a specific, proper *function*, viz., the function of moral schematism.¹¹ Furthermore, upon closer scrutiny, we will discover that Kant leaves open three possibilities which enable him to grant religion, in the functional role of moral schematism, its proper truth and essence within the realm of pure practical philosophy.

In the role of serviceability to the final end of pure morality, religion is called upon three times to mediate the elevation of the finite into the infinite through a schematic act. It is in this mediation that Kant locates the practical essence and unique truth of religion. Within the systematic totality of moral concepts and principles of pure moral philosophy, Kant distinguishes three moments of finitude. I am speaking here of three moments wherein the practical principle of autonomy is confronted with finitude. I entitle these moments as follows: First, by the *Analytic of Finitude* I wish to refer to the presentation of the moral law, especially with regard to the moral constraint of this law, that is, duty,

¹⁰ KrV, B xxx.

¹¹ A precise indication of this proposition is also to be found in F. Ricken and F. Marty, *Kant über Religion* (Stuttgart/Berlin/Köln: Verlag W. Kohlhammer 1992) 60: "The elaboration of (Kant's concept) of religion belongs to the problem of connecting the sensible with the intelligible. As a consequence of this, schematism will represent the appropriated place where in Kant's perspective, the question of religion must be elucidated."

which is to be found in Kant's "Analytic of Pure Practical Reason." Second, by the *Dialectic of Finitude* I intend the presentation of the idea of the highest good, specifically the *bonum consummatum*, as it is to be found in the "Dialectic of Pure Practical Reason." Third, and finally, by the *Drama of Finitude* I intend Kant's presentation of the "Battle of the Good Against the Evil Principle for Dominion Over the Human Being." In each of these three situations Kant locates a *momentum* for a philosophy of religion. What must be noted in this regard, is the surprising fact that in each such situation religion is especially and uniquely expected to provide a service of a schematic function in full accordance with the critical requirements of the system of pure morality. The well-known saying of Kant that "morality leads inevitably to religion"¹² must therefore be understood from the perspective of this serviceability. In other words, Kant can be interpreted here as affirming three times the statement that "morality leads," from within a situation of finitude on the part of human practical reason, "inevitably to religion," or more clearly still, to the religious affirmation: "There is a God!" Morality leads one to religion so that reason, through this religious mediation, can realize its final end (which is characterized by obligation or duty).

At first blush, such usage of the term "schematism" seems to be in direct contradiction with the letter of Kant's own *Critique of Practical Reason*. Nevertheless, I argue as follows that this usage agrees with it at least in spirit: In the area of pure moral philosophy we encounter a fact which is analogous to one encountered in Kant's discussion of truth in the theoretical realm, namely, that the "finitization" (*begrenzen*) of pure human reason is grounded in the necessary connection of reason to sensibility. However, this "finitization" of pure reason does not take place endogenously. This is because pure reason's autonomy and freedom are

¹² I. Kant, *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (1783, ²1784). *Akad.-Ausg.*, 6:8 [the English translation is cited from I. Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings*, trans. by A. Wood and G. di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998)].

based precisely on unconditioned self-possession, and self-legislation. Rather, reason's finitude has an exogenous origin. In order for practical reason to realize its natural end and interest within the proper field, it must deal with material that presents itself as completely unordered. For this reason, a schematic function is necessary that can somehow make this ordering possible.

In Kant's theoretical work, by comparison, he solves this problem in two moments. In the first moment, Kant introduces the concept of "pure sensibility," that is, the pure *a priori* form of time. It is through the transcendental aesthetical setting of time's immanent order that the possibility of categorical knowledge of nature is prepared. In a second moment, this possibility is realized through the schematism of the transcendental imagination, which mediates between the pure forms of intuition and the pure concepts of the understanding.

In the practical case, however, pure reason and its legislation are confronted with a bare manifold, that is, with the concrete life of the maxims of the human power of choice (*Willkür*), which presents itself as completely unordered. In this respect, needless to say that life in its state of nature lacks any unity that a principle of order demands. Insofar as this immanent ordering is naturally lacking in the concrete life of maxims, this ordering becomes for the human moral will an object of duty, or acquires the characteristic of an "ought." The problem in this practical case then, is specifically how the "ought" which derives from the supersensible ordering principle of autonomy, can be related to sensible willing without it thereby compromising freedom's absolute character.

In his solution to this problem, Kant, in his *Second Critique*, resolutely rejects the faculty of imagination and its function of schematism, and in its place elaborates his doctrine, "On the Typic of Pure Practical Judgment"¹³. Kant ap-

¹³ I. Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (1788). *Akad.-Ausg.*, 5:67 [citations from the English translation of second Critique are from I. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, first edition, translated by L. W. Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merill 1980).

peals in this text to the mediating function of understanding and its project of a universal lawfulness of nature, and in this manner attempts to save the proper absolute character of the “ought” as a law of freedom. The schematism of transcendental imagination is unsuitable for this purpose, according to Kant, since it provides the schema for the empirically given case in accordance with a law, and hence is in part dependent on the form of the given sensible manifold. The law of freedom, by comparison, is in no way dependent on the sensible, but rather requires the schematism of the law *itself*. The doctrine of the type elucidates precisely this act of schematism through which the duty of freedom is brought into connection with the understanding (as the faculty of rules) in order to form the type of the moral law. But is there nevertheless still a space and a need for yet another schematism? For the following reasons, I think this is the case.

Let us grant the definition of the type as the intellectual representation of the universal lawfulness of nature according to which the law of freedom can be realized *in concreto*. Granting this, there remains in human reason an incapacity to realize the aim of this “ought” in the sensible realm. It is precisely the pure intellectual character of the type that confronts human reason once more with its practical incapacity and finitude. For even if reason is able to recognize itself in the lawfulness of the type which rules the realization of freedom *in concreto*, the “finitization” of human reason is not thereby suppressed. This only solves the problem of mediation that was raised, in Kant’s words, only on the “objectively logical” level. The solution of the problem as it arises on the *subjectively logical* level, namely, as the problem of finite human reason confronted with chaos and the void, requires a schematism of a subjectively logical nature. The role of this specific schematism on subjectively logical grounds is played, I claim, by religion. I will now demonstrate according to the three above-mentioned titles, how Kant appeals to religion as a moral schematism on subjectively logical grounds.

1. *The Analytic of Finitude*

[Referential text: “Beschuß. Die Religionslehre als Lehre der Pflichten gegen Gott liegt außerhalb den Grenzen der reinen Moralphilosophie,” in: *Die Metaphysik der Sitten* (1787, 1798)]¹⁴

Kant in this text deals with the theme of “the formal aspect of all religion”. He defines this “formal aspect of all religion as the sum of all duties as (*instar*) divine commands”¹⁵. The meaning of the term ‘formal’ is located in the preposition “as” (*instar*) which is principally distinguished from duty “with regard to (*erga*).” For Kant, religion according to this formal essence must be incorporated within the limits of pure moral philosophy on merely subjectively logical grounds. Kant asks: What is the ground “on which a human being is to think of all his duties in keeping with this formal aspect of religion (their relation to a divine will given *a priori*)?” His answer is based on an idea of schematism: “We cannot very well make obligation (moral constraint) intuitive for ourselves without thereby thinking of *another’s* will, namely, God’s (of which reason in giving universal laws is only the spokesperson)”¹⁶. The idea of God as the one who obligates is thus necessarily integrated into the representation of moral duty on subjectively logical grounds. Within what I have called the “Analytic of Finitude,” it is precisely the concept of duty that reveals in itself the *momentum* of finitude. Out of this *momentum* of finitude, and in order “to make obligation intuitive for ourselves,” religion in its formal aspect explicitly gets a place and a function of schematism within the system of pure moral concepts.

¹⁴ *Akad.-Ausg.*, 6:486 f.; trans.: “Conclusion of the Doctrine of Virtue,” in: *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. and edited by Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.).

¹⁵ *Akad.-Ausg.*, 6:487.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

2. *The Dialectic of Finitude*

[Referential text: “Das Dasein Gottes, als ein Postulat der reinen praktischen Vernunft,” in: *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (1788)]¹⁷

The *momentum* of finitude is revealed in this text in Kant’s discussion of the concept of the *bonum perfectissimum*. In relation to the reality of this concept, Kant raises the problem of synthesis in his doctrine on the postulates. The problem concerns how the two heterogeneous components, morality and happiness, or reason and sensibility, can become synthesized within the unique purpose of pure practical reason, when human reason as such is incapable of being the cause of this synthesis. It is precisely the consciousness of this incapacity that creates within human reason the need for the postulate of the existence of God, or, in Kant’s words, “the supposition of a Supreme cause of nature which has a causality corresponding to the moral intentions”¹⁸. Moreover, Kant states clearly “that this moral necessity is subjective, namely, a need”¹⁹. The affirmation of the existence of God rests on this subjectively logical basis, which is furthermore the ground of pure rational faith. For Kant, this affirmation expresses the essence of all religion, namely, the “recognition of all duties as divine commands.” Only through this recognition taking place within religion and rational faith can I hope to realize “the highest possible good in a world [and to make it for me] the final object of all my conduct”²⁰. Only religion, through its subjectively logical mediation, can resolve this situation of need wherein human reason is essentially lacking. Only through religion is it possible to realize the “harmony of my will with that of a holy

¹⁷ *Akad.-Ausg.*, 5:124 f.; trans.: “Doctrine on the Postulates. The Existence of God as a Postulate of Pure Practical Reason,” in: *Critique of Practical Reason*, hereafter cited as CpR, first edition, translated by L. W. Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merill 1980).

¹⁸ *Akad.-Ausg.*, 5:125; CpR, 130

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ *Akad.-Ausg.*, 5:129; CpR, 133.

and beneficent author of the world”²¹. Hence, through an analysis of all these components – need, synthesis and correspondence, and the concept of the ‘subjectively logical’ – it is possible to demonstrate a second time the specific function of schematism carried out by religion. It should be noticed that Kant assigns this function to religion in a definitional way. Religion, as a function of schematism, is in this text grafted onto the dialectical concept of the highest good within a system of moral concepts.

3. *The Drama of Finitude*

[Referential text: “Anmerkung. Von der Wiederherstellung der ursprünglichen Anlage zum Guten in ihre Kraft,” in: *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (1794)]²²

Kant says that the human being is “by nature evil.” For my purposes it is important to come to an understanding of what Kant means when he says “by nature” here. Kant defines it as follows: “We may presuppose evil as subjectively necessary in every human being, even the best”²³. The reason for this “must be cognized *a priori* from the concept of evil, so far as the latter is possible according to the laws of freedom”²⁴. Kant calls this the “perversity of the heart”²⁵. In this statement is revealed the third moment of “finitization” with respect to human reason. This “finitization” is situated in the perverting conflict between two moral incentives, namely, the moral law and the law of self-love. More specifically, the problem concerns the necessity of making a choice through which one of these two incentives is taken as a

²¹ Ibidem.

²² *Akad.-Ausg.*, 6:22 ff.; trans.: “General Remark: Concerning the restoration to its power of the original predisposition to the good,” in: *Religion within the Boundaries ...*, see note 12.

²³ *Akad.-Ausg.*, 6:32.

²⁴ *Akad.-Ausg.*, 6:35.

²⁵ *Akad.-Ausg.*, 6:37.

principle under which the other is subordinated.²⁶ It is precisely this moment of external “finitization” that represents within Kant’s pure moral philosophy an original *momentum* to think the essence of religion. It is moral religion specifically that is brought in as the key function for “the restoration to its power of the original disposition to good”²⁷. This restoration is essentially the recovery of the purity of the moral law as the supreme ground of all our maxims. In Kant’s own words, “a human being, who incorporates this purity into his maxims, [...] is [...] upon the road of endless progress toward holiness”²⁸. How this restoration is *objectively* possible is, according to Kant, a question of revolution. He states that “a revolution is necessary in the mode of thought (*Denkungsart*)”²⁹. In contrast, restoration is *subjectively* possible in what Kant terms “the mode of sense (*Sinnesart*),” and we must represent this revolution as a “gradual reformation”³⁰. In order to accomplish this subjectively logical and necessary reformation of the heart, religion must serve a function of schematism. Kant explicitly refers to such a mediation when he rejects every “immediate consciousness”³¹ of the possibility of this reformation. The reason for this rejection is that “the depths of [the human heart] are to [the human being] inscrutable”³².

After establishing this third *momentum* of finitude, Kant develops more fully the definition of a moral religion. This elaboration occurs in the section entitled, “Concerning the Battle of the Good Against the Evil Principle for Dominion Over the Human Being”³³. This section contains what might be called Kant’s philosophical Christology. For Kant, Christ *objectively* represents the functional meaning of the “original model” or the “prototype” (*Urbild*). Taken *subjectively*, on the

²⁶ Cf. *Akad.-Ausg.*, 6:36.

²⁷ *Akad.-Ausg.*, 6:44.

²⁸ *Akad.-Ausg.*, 6:46-47.

²⁹ *Akad.-Ausg.*, 6:67.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

³¹ *Akad.-Ausg.*, 6:51.

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ *Akad.-Ausg.*, 6:57.

other hand, Christ becomes a working exemplar, which serves “to make the idea of a human being morally pleasing to God a model to us”³⁴. The critique occurring within the limits of pure reason in relation to the prototype of Christ forbids what Kant calls its “hypostatization in a particular human being” (Ibid.). Instead, what the critique assumes is a Christology in the function of schematism.³⁵ Indeed, for sake of the restoring to the original predisposition’s power to the good, Kant has philosophically called upon a moral Christo-centered religion. Finitude, displayed in the tension between “*Denkungsart*” and “*Sinnesart*,” with regard to the necessary restoration, will thus have opened again a proper locus for religion. By the same token, to this moral Christo-centered religion is assigned the role of a schematic mediation.

Conclusions

In his *First Critique*, Kant has described schematism as “a secret art residing in the depth of the human soul, an art whose true stratagems we shall hardly ever divine from nature and lay bare before ourselves”³⁶. This ‘depth’ to which Kant points, is the depth of a finite human mind, which is, in a perplexing manner, placed before a necessary and impossible assignment at once, namely, the ascent from the sensible to the supersensible. Finitude and depth are, for Kant, the philosophical coordinates wherein which the life of the human soul is enacted, both in its theoretical and moral/practical interests. We have in this short inquiry noticed how this finitude, especially within the moral practical domain of pure reason, has made itself felt in three different shapes: first, in the definition of moral obligation, second, in the idea as to its possibility of the unconditioned totality of

³⁴ *Akad.-Ausg.*, 6:64.

³⁵ Cf. *Akad.-Ausg.*, 6:65, the theory of “schematism of analogy” with regard to this Christology.

³⁶ KrV, B 181.

the object of pure willing, third, in the representation of the combat, which a person (a human being under the obligatory reverence for the law), should muster against the impulses of radical evil within himself. In a strictly consequent way, Kant has grafted upon these *momenta* of finitude the ordinate of an inscrutable depth, issuing in the proper domain of religion. Through such a gesture, Kant has conceived the essence of religion, which is in itself ensconced within incomprehensibility according to a schematizing functionality. On various *momenta* of finite human practical reason's striving towards its final end, religion is essentially effected by, and at the same time effecting, this infinite relation or mediation. Exploring with respect to this relation all essential elements, Kant's philosophy of pure practical reason terminates in disclosing these elements in their religiously qualified depths. On precisely these revelatory moments, Kant sees consequently his systematic philosophy of pure practical rationality transformed into a "doctrine of wisdom (*Weisheitslehre*), which as a science, is philosophy in the sense in which the ancients understood this word"³⁷. What has been clarified in *sensu scholastico* in accordance with pure practical reason's scientific interests, relying on an idea of schematism has, in this perspective of wisdom, shown itself in its true use for philosophy *in sensu cosmico*. What is called "abyss" in the former philosophy of reason becomes renamed in a compatible way the "ultimate end" of human reason for the latter.

³⁷ *Akad.-Ausg.*, 5:108.

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“WISHFUL THINKING”
CONCERNING FICHTE’S INTERPRETATION OF THE
POSTULATES OF REASON IN HIS *VERSUCH EINER KRITIK ALLER
OFFENBARUNG* (1792)

DANIEL BREAZEALE

Exactly one year after first reading Kant’s three *Critiques*, Fichte found himself sequestered in a rented room in Königsberg, writing a “Critique” of his own, in which he attempted to explore the religious and theological implications of the Critical philosophy by developing the first “Critical” theory of revelation. The unusual circumstances that led him to compose his *Versuch einer Kritik aller Offenbarung*¹ in the summer of 1791 are well-known, as are the even more unusual and dramatic consequences of the publication of this text nearly a year later, in the spring of 1792. Though certainly not ignored by scholars, the attention that Fichte’s first original publication² has received has been

¹ In *J. G. Fichte – Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* [= GA], Reihe I, Band 1, ed. Reinhard Lauth, Hans Jacob (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: frommann-holzboog 1964). Page references to the *Versuch* will be to this Critical edition. See too Garrett Green’s excellent English translation, *Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1978). All English translations in this paper, however, are my own.

In what follows, I shall be concerned primarily with the first edition of the *Versuch* (published in the spring of 1792), and will cite passages from the expanded, second edition (published in the spring of 1793) only when they serve to amplify or to clarify points contained in the first edition.

² In the summer of 1787/88, while he was living in poverty in Leipzig and trying to avoid seeking yet another position as a private tutor, Fichte was for a short time a regular book reviewer for the newly launched *Kritische Uebersicht der neusten schönen Literatur* and published 14 reviews in this short-lived journal. Fichte’s authorship of these reviews was discovered and established only in 1968, when they were edited and published with an introduction by Reinhard Lauth,

largely biographical or historical in nature. The understanding of religion contained in this text has been compared (almost always unfavorably) with Fichte's later views on the subject, and only rarely has serious attention been paid to the actual arguments employed by Fichte in this early text or to the conclusions of the same.³ In defense of this neglect, one can always cite Fichte's own harsh judgment of his first book as "bad," "mediocre," "superficial," based upon false premises, and poorly argued.⁴ Even as he was writing

"Vierzehn Rezensionen J.G. Fichtes aus dem Jahre 1788," in: *Kant-Studien* 59 (1968) 5-57.

³ For a survey of scholarly interpretations of Fichte's *Versuch*, see Michael Kessler, *Kritik aller Offenbarung. Untersuchungen zu einem Forschungsprogramm Johann Gottlieb Fichtes und zur Entstehung und Wirkung seines „Versuchs“ von 1792* (Mainz: Mathias Grünewald Verlag 1986) 71-94.

⁴ In his August 18, 1791 letter to Kant, accompanying the manuscript of the *Versuch*, Fichte apologizes for his work with the comment, "Aber kann es mir verziehen werden, daß ich sie Ihnen übergebe, da sie nach meinem eignen Bewusstsein schlecht ist?" (GA III/1:254). ["But can I be forgiven for giving you something that I am aware is bad?"] Indeed, he began considering revisions immediately after finishing the manuscript of the first edition, as is indicated by his August 28, 1791 entry in "Tagebuch meiner Osterabreise aus Sachsen nach Pohlen, u. Preußen": "Noch gestern Abends fing ich an meine Critik zu revidiren, u. kam auf recht gute, tiefe Gedanken, die mich aber leider überzeugten, daß die erste Bearbeitung von Grund aus oberflächlich ist" (GA I/1:416). ["Yesterday evening I once again began to revise my Critique and came upon some quite good and deep thoughts. Unfortunately, however, these convinced me that the first version is, from the bottom up, superficial."]

See too Fichte's October 11, 1791 letter to F. A. Weißhuhn, in which he apologizes to his friend for his forthcoming book, explaining that though the results are correct, the means by which he reaches them are not and adding that, "Ich selbst bin – es ist nicht erheuchelte AutorBescheidenheit – herzlich schlecht damit zufrieden" (GA III/1:268) [It is not out of hypocritical authorial modesty that I say sincerely that I am poorly satisfied with it."] Later in this same letter he comments: "Es ist nichts neues durch unrichtige Praemißen auf richtige Resultate zu kommen" (GA III/1:269). ["It is nothing new to arrive at correct results from incorrect premises."] In a later letter to Weißhuhn, July[?], 1794, Fichte writes, "Ich sage ihnen vor der Hand unter uns – bis ich's zu seiner Zeit der ganzen Welt werde sagen kön-

it, he was painfully aware of its deficiencies and was already making plans to replace it with a more systematic work, which would integrate the discussion of revelation into the larger context of a general "critique of the Ideas of reflection."⁵

nen – daß mir die Offenbarungskritik sehr mittelmäßig schien, als ich sie geschrieben hatte, und daß es wirklich Kant's Zureden und meines Geldmangels bedurfte, um mich zu vermögen, daß ich sie in den Druck gäbe" (GA III/2:181). [I can tell you confidentially – and, at the right time, I will be able to tell the whole world – that the Critique of Revelation seems to me mediocre, and I really allowed it to be published only because of Kant's encouragement and my own need for money.]"

⁵ In his previously cited letter of October 11, 1791 to Weißhuhn, Fichte indicates that he is already at work on a sequel to the *Versuch*, which he describes as "eine Kritik des Begriffs der Vorsehung, besonders mit Beziehung auf die mögl. Trostgründe bei den Leiden des Lebens" ["a critique of the concept of Providence, with special reference to possible consolation for the sufferings of life"] (GA III/1:269). By July 1, 1792 in a letter to Johan Friedrich Gensichen, he has expanded this project to include the concept of miracles as well as that of providence: "Sollte ich jemals wieder zu der Ruhe kommen, daß ich schreiben könnte, so, glaube ich, würde ich den Begriff vom Wunder, und von der Vorsehung kritisch beleuchten: Begriffe, die auf das Schicksal einer Offenbarungskritik viel Einfluß haben, und wo ich in Absicht des erstern, den ich in meinem Versuch berühren muste, nicht ganz gut gethan zu haben glaube, daß ich ihn so kurz mit einem allgemeinen kantischen Satze abfertigte ... Beide Begriffe haben, außer dem, daß es beide Reflexions-Begriffe sind, noch vieles andre gemeinschaftlich, und ich vermthe, daß sie, und vielleicht noch andere, ein System in unserm Geiste ausmachen, das einer Kritik würdig, und bedürftig wäre" (GA III/1:318-19). ["If I ever have the time to write, then I believe I will critically illuminate the concepts of miracles and Providence. These concepts have a great deal of influence upon the fate of Critique of Revelation. Though I had to deal with the former in my *Attempt*, I do not think it did so very well, since I dispatched it so briefly with a general Kantian principle. In addition to the fact that both are concepts of reflection, these two concepts have much else in common, and I suspect that they, perhaps along with other concepts, form a complete system in our mind, a system that would be worthy of and in need of a critique."] See too Fichte's letter to Johann Friedrich Gensichen, August 1, 1792).

This same project is described in a September 27, 1792 draft of a letter to Eisenstuck and in a September 30, 1792 letter to H. T. von

It is therefore unsurprising that so little serious attention has been paid to the *Versuch* in its own right. The remarks that follow are intended as a modest and partial effort to rectify this omission by examining and evaluating a single, central theme from this text: Fichte's theory of the "postulates of reason" and his efforts to relate the concept of revelation to the same. Though the Kantian roots of Fichte's views are obvious, I will emphasize the more original – and, in some cases, pre-Critical – features of this theory, as well as the tensions and problems implicit in his interpretation of the postulates.

Well before his initial exposure to Kant's writings, Fichte was firmly committed to the view that religion can be understood properly only in its relationship to moral practice. In his unpublished writings of 1785-1790, written under the influence of Lessing, Rousseau, and others, he developed an unsystematic concept of genuine religion as a "religion of the heart" and understood religious instruction as consisting primarily, if not exclusively, of moral education; indeed, he sometimes came very close to identifying religion and morality and always emphasized the gulf separating rational reflection or speculation from moral-religious "feeling." By 1790 this theoretical "gulf" had turned into a practical conflict between the mutually incompatible claims of "head" and "heart," poignantly recorded in a manuscript from the

Schön as "ein größeres Gebäude" ["a large structure"], "ein ausgebreiteteres Werk" ["a more expansive work"], and "ein ganz neues, umfaßenderes Werk" ["an entirely new, more comprehensive work"], explicitly intended to "take the place" of the *Versuch* (GA III/1:341 and 349). This projected book is later described as a "Kritik der Reflexions-Ideen (der Begriffe von Vorsehung, Wunder, Offenbarung)" ["Critique of the Ideas of reflection (Providence, Miracles, Revelation)"] in Fichte's letter to Gottlieb Hufeland, March 28, 1793 (GA III/1:379). Fichte explains the need for such a larger work in his April 2, 1793 letter to Kant as follows: "Jetzt habe ich vor's erste meine Offenbarungs-Theorie zu *begründen*. Die Materialien sind da; und es wird nicht viel Zeit erfordern, sie zu ordnen" (GA III/1:389). ["My current project to provide my theory of revelation with a *foundation*. The materials are there, and it will not take much time to arrange them."]

summer of 1790 entitled “Einige Aphorismen über Religion und Deismus.”⁶

It was at precisely this point that Fichte experienced his momentous “conversion” to the Critical philosophy, which he saw as offering the key for escaping the untenable contradiction between morality and speculation. Each of the three *Critiques* supplied him with an essential element of his new strategy: the first established the limits of theoretical reason and demonstrated its inapplicability to the realm of morality; the second showed that moral practice was not a matter of mere “feeling,” but involved a rigorous application of purely rational laws, albeit laws of practical rather than of theoretical reason; and the third, with its vindication of the special domain and character of the power of reflective judgment, pointed the way toward establishing the higher unity of theoretical and practical reason, or rather of nature and spirit, on the basis of a postulated, common supersensible ground.

All three of these Kantian insights are brought into play in the 1792 *Versuch*, which is an effort to show that certain religious concepts are rationally justifiable, albeit not by purely theoretical or speculative reason. The model for Fichte’s “deduction” of religious concepts is obviously Kant’s “deduction,” in the second *Critique*, of the Ideas of freedom, God, and immortality as necessary “postulates of practical reason.” But Fichte adopted this model to his own purposes and amended it in various ways, frequently supplementing it – if not supplanting it entirely – with arguments derived from the rather different and explicitly teleological “proof of the existence of God” proposed by Kant in Part Two of the third *Critique*. (In fact, one of the more interesting features of Fichte’s *Versuch*, as well as one of the chief sources of its

⁶ GA II/1:287-91. Regarding Fichte’s philosophical and religious views prior to 1792, see my forthcoming study, as well as Reiner Preul, *Reflexion und Gefühl. Die Theologie Fichtes in seiner vorkantischen Zeit* (Berlin: De Gruyter 1969) and the first chapters of Armin G. Wildfeuer, *Praktische Vernunft und System. Entwicklungsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur ursprünglichen Kant-Rezeption Johann Gottlieb Fichtes* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: frommann-holzboog 1999).

obscurity, is the way in which Fichte's "deductions" combine arguments from the second and third *Critiques*.)

On the basis of his new appreciation of the *practical* dimension of reason, Fichte says, in § 2 of the first edition of his work, a "Deduction der Religion überhaupt," beginning with a deduction of the Idea of God as something that we *simply must presuppose* as a condition for achieving practical reason's "final purpose" or *Endzweck*: viz., "the highest good," here defined as "die höchste sittliche Vollkommenheit, vereint mit der höchsten Glückseligkeit."⁷ From this, Fichte proceeds in orthodox Kantian fashion to the postulate of immortality, though throughout the book he treats the latter as something of an afterthought.⁸ It becomes increasingly clear, however, that Fichte's actual deductive procedure is disguised or misrepresented by the Kantian model he generally follows in § 2.⁹ First of all, and much more unequivocally than Kant, Fichte concedes that "freedom" is not actually a "postulate of reason" at all and thus requires no deduction. Instead, it is something of which everyone is or can be expected to be immediately (self-)conscious.¹⁰ Instead

⁷ p. 19. ["... the highest moral perfection, combined with the highest happiness."] This is not identical to the concept of the highest good put forward by Kant in the second *Critique*, which is that of human happiness in conformity to moral desserts. For Kant, another step is required in order to deduce the Idea of God from that of the highest good. For Fichte, in contrast, the concept of the highest good seems virtually identical to that of God.

⁸ See p. 109, where Fichte notes that "der Glaube an Unsterblichkeit läßt sich als von der Existenz Gottes bloß abgeleitet betrachten, und wir haben mithin hier keine besondere Rücksicht auf ihn zu nehmen" ["belief in immortality can be viewed as merely derived from the existence of God, and thus we do not here have to pay any special attention to it"].

⁹ Surely one of the sources of Fichte's own dissatisfaction with his first publication was precisely this lack of coherence between the earlier and later portions. The "first postulate" really should have been introduced at the beginning of the book and not, as actually occurs, only in the second half of the same.

¹⁰ "Daß der Mensch frey sey, lehrt jeden unmittelbar sein Selbstbewußtsey" (p. 90). ["Each person's self-consciousness teaches him directly that man is free."] See too pp. 21, 79 and 94. Despite these

of pretending to infer human freedom from the demands of the moral law, Fichte treats the former as an "original datum" in its own right: not a *postulate*, but a *premise*. Hence, instead of moving directly from the moral law to God, Fichte's deduction of the postulates begins with a "first postulate" that has no parallel in the second *Critique*, though anticipations of it might be found in the third: namely, the postulate of the "Causalität des Moralgesetzes in allen vernünftigen Wesen," a causality that is "schlechthin und ohne alle Bedingungen gefordert."¹¹

We are immediately and absolutely certain that the pure will is free, in the sense that the "higher faculty of desire" or *höhere Begehrungsvermögen* is freely determinable in accordance with the moral law and purely from respect for the same. From this, however, it by no means follows that the free, pure will possesses any additional, real "causality" whatsoever, whether internal or external, or that it can have any influence upon our empirical motives or produce an appearance within the sensible world. It remains theoretically possible that the pure will exercises a purely "spiritual causality" and is quite powerless over the laws of nature.¹² According to Fichte's argument, however, the pure will simply *demand*s more than this and requires empirical causality in the sensible world.¹³ A *postulate* is therefore required at this point, "[das] erste[] Postulat, das die practische Vernunft a priori macht": namely, "daß etwas *ausser* der Natur eine Causalität *in* der Natur habe." Practical reason must make such a postulate "indem sie das Uebernatürliche in uns, unser oberes Begehrungsvermögen, bestimmt, Ursache au-

unequivocal assertions, Fichte still echoes Kant on occasion and lists freedom as one of the postulates, just as he also sometimes fails to include his own "first postulate" concerning "the causality of the will" on his list of postulates.

¹¹ p. 49. ["... the causality of the moral law in all rational beings [is] simply demanded unconditionally".]

¹² As Fichte puts it, the moral and natural laws are "infinitely different" and govern two quite separate worlds (p. 70).

¹³ See p. 50.

ßer sich in der Sinnenwelt, entweder der in uns, oder der außer uns zu werden.”¹⁴

From this immediately postulated “causality of the will,” it is but a short step to the postulate of God’s existence. Since the moral law and the natural law are “infinitely different,” the only way we are able to conceive of the postulated causality of the former within the domain of the latter is to by further postulating a morally good and supremely intelligent “supersensible ground” of both. Such a supernatural being would be able to effect changes in the sensible world, or insure the requisite harmony between our moral intentions and the sensible results or our actions, because it would be the morally perfect *author* of nature.

Even with such a postulate, it still remains *theoretically* possible that the rule of right is never effective in the manner demanded by practical reason, which would nevertheless continue to demand obedience to the moral law, even if one’s objectives could never be realized in the manner demanded by the first postulate. But it would not, according to Fichte, be *practically* possible for anyone to *believe* this or even to harbor any *doubt* on this score. A person who really thought that his moral willing would have no real, sensible consequences, would have to admit that, in acting morally, he is doing no more than “chasing after a chimera.” He would thus be admitting not only that he acts irrationally,

¹⁴ p. 69. [“The first postulate that practical reason makes a priori is that it is at all possible [that something *outside* of nature could have a causality *within* nature], inasmuch as it determines what is supernatural in us, our higher faculty of desire, to become a cause beyond itself in the sensible world, either the one in us or the one outside us.”]

Though he employs it in the first edition, Fichte spells out the systematic relationship between the lower and higher faculties of desire in much more detail in the new § 2 (“Theorie des Willens, als Vorbereitung einer Deduction der Religion überhaupt”) added to the second edition. The higher faculty of desire is there described as the “wunderbare Vermögen” to determine the will freely, purely on the basis of the feeling of respect for the moral law or by the Idea of what is absolutely right [*die Idee des schlechthin Rechten*], whereas the lower faculty of desire is normally (except in the case of free action) determined by “sensible impulse” [*sinnliche Trieb*]. (See 2nd ed., § 2, pp. 139-41)

but that he thinks irrationally as well, inasmuch as he declares to be impossible what he also recognizes to be the highest principle of all his actions (which can be described variously as “the causality of the moral law,” the concept of the “the highest good,”¹⁵ or the principle of “absolute

¹⁵ The follow passage is a good illustration of how Fichte systematically conflates the “concept of the highest good” (ultimately derived from Kant’s second *Critique*) with the principle of the teleological causality (derived from the third *Critique*): “Aber die Bestimmung des Begehrungsvermögens durch das Moralgesetz, das Recht zu wollen, soll eine Causalität haben, es wenigstens zum Theil wirklich hervorzubringen. Wir sind unmittelbar genöthigt, das Recht in unserer eignen Natur als von uns abhängig zu betrachten; und wenn wir etwas dem Begriffe desselben widerstreitendes in uns entdecken, so empfinden wir [...] Reue, Schaam, Selbstverachtung. In Absicht des Rechts *in uns* fordert also das Moralgesetz in uns schlechterdings eine Causalität zur Hervorbringung desselben, in Absicht desselben *ausser uns* aber kann es dieselbe nicht geradezu fordern, weil wir dasselbe nicht als unmittelbar von uns abhängig betrachten können. In Absicht des letztern also wirkt das Moralgesetz in uns ein bloßes Verlangen des Rechts, aber kein Bestreben es hervorzubringen. Dieses Verlangen des Rechts außer uns, d.i. einer dem Grade unsrer Moralität angemessenen Glückseligkeit ist wirklich *durch das Moralgesetz* entstanden. [...] Dieses Verlangen aber ist so wenig werden *müssig* [...] noch unberechtigt, daß vielmehr das Moralgesetz *das Recht in uns* zur Bedingung *des Rechts ausser uns* macht [...] und dies thut es dadurch, indem es uns unsre Handlungen dem Princip der Allgemeingültigkeit unterzuordnen befiehlt; da *allgemeines Gelten* (nicht bloß Gültigkeit) *des Moralgesetzes*, und *dem Grade der Moralität jedes vernünftigen Wesens völlig angemessene Glückseligkeit* identische Begriffe sind” (pp. 26-27). [“But the determination of the faculty of desire by the moral law to will the right ought to have enough causality actually to produce what is right, at least in part. We are immediately required to regard the right within our nature as dependent upon ourselves; and when we discover something in ourselves that conflicts with this concept, we feel [...] remorse, shame, and self-contempt. As far as the right *within us* is concerned, therefore, the moral law in us simply demands a causality for producing what is right; but as far as the right *outside us* is concerned, the moral law cannot directly require such causality, because we cannot regard this as immediately dependent on ourselves. As far as the latter is concerned, therefore, the moral law produces in us a mere desire for the right but no endeavor to produce it. This desire for the right outside ourselves, i.e. for a happiness appropriate to the degree of our morality, has actually arisen *through the moral law*. [...]

right").¹⁶ Nor could he escape the charge of irrationality by taking refuge in an attitude of skeptical indifference regarding the reality of the postulated causality, for such indiffer-

but this desire is neither idle [...] nor unjustified; on the contrary, the moral law makes *the right within us* into the condition for the *right outside us*. [...] And the moral law does this by commanding our actions to subordinate themselves to the principle of universal validity, since the *universal effectiveness* (not the mere validity) *of the moral law and happiness fully appropriate to the degree of morality in every rational being* are identical concepts" (pp. 26-27).

¹⁶ As Fichte explains on p. 23, the determination of the higher faculty of desire by the moral law occurs immediately and is "rational in itself." It thus requires no additional justification or deduction. But every determination of the lower faculty of desire must presuppose at least the *possibility* of its object, for otherwise the desire is quite irrational, i.e. self-contradictory. "Wenn nun die Regel des Rechts nie allgemeingeltend werden weder würde noch könnte, so bliebe zwar darum immer jene Forderung der Causalität des Moralgesetzes zur Hervordringung des Rechts in uns, als Factum da, aber es wäre schlechterdings unmöglich, daß sie in concreto, in einer Natur wie die unsrige, erfüllt werden könnte. Denn so bald wir bei einer moralischen Handlung uns nur fragten: was mache ich doch? so müßte unsre theoretische Vernunft uns antworten: ich ringe, etwas schlechthin unmöglich möglich zu machen, ich laufe nach einer Schimäre, ich handle offenbar unvernünftig; und sobald wir wieder auf die Stimme des Gesetzes hörten, müßten wir urtheilen: ich denke offenbar unvernünftig, indem ich dasjenige, was mir schlechthin als Princip aller meiner Handlungen aufgestellt ist, für unmöglich erkläre" (p. 27). ["If the rule of right never would nor could become universally effective, the demand that the causality of the moral law produce the right in us would still remain there, as a fact, but it would be simply impossible to fulfill this demand *in concreto*, in a nature such as ours. In this case, any time when asked ourselves what we were doing when we were acting morally, our theoretical reason would answer, 'I am struggling to produce something that is simply impossible; I am running after a chimera; obviously, I am acting irrationally.' And as soon as we listened again the voice of the law we would have to judge, 'I am obviously thinking irrationally, inasmuch as I declare to be impossible what is absolutely established for me as the principle of all my actions.'"]

See too p. 19: We have to assume the highest good on the basis of practical principles, for if we assumed that the highest good was, in fact, impossible, "we would be placing ourselves in the self-contradiction of willing something impossible" ["würden wir uns mit uns selbst in den Widerspruch setzen, etwas *unmögliches zu wollen*"].

ence is simply incompatible with “unserm *ernsten* Wollen dieses Endzwecks.”¹⁷ Instead, such *mauvais foi* would be an eloquent expression of the basic contradiction between freedom and nature that the postulates are meant to mitigate.

A person in either of these conditions – whether he denied the causality of the will or simply had doubts about the same – would be deeply divided against himself; he would be constantly torn between the dictates of theoretical and practical reason and would have no way of choosing between them. Hence he would not be free at all. From this observation Fichte concludes that anyone who sincerely affirms his own freedom, that is to say, anyone who attempts to act in obedience to the moral law, absolutely must explicitly affirm the thoroughgoing causality of the latter. In assuming that freedom can produce an appearance within the sensible world one postulates the dominion of the practical *Vermögen* over the theoretical. The higher faculty of desire “muß mithin auch über die Natur nicht nur gebieten, sondern herrschen.”¹⁸ Since we have no grounds for directly affirming such a “primacy of the practical” within ourselves, we must affirm it *indirectly*, by postulating “daß ein freies, intelligentes Wesen einem Begriffe vom Zwecke gemäß Ursache in der Sinnenwelt seyn könnte; welches wir für Gott, um der Möglichkeit eines praktischen Gesetzes in sinnlichen Wesen willen, annehmen mußten.”¹⁹ Moreover, the divine “attributes”

¹⁷ p. 19, emphasis added. [“... the *sincere* willing of this final purpose.”]

¹⁸ 2nd ed., p. 21n. [“Thus it must not only make demands of nature, it must rule over nature”]. See too p. 50.

¹⁹ 2nd ed., p. 157. [“... that a free, intelligent being may be a cause in the sensible world, in conformity with a concept of a purpose, which is what we had to assume for God for the sake of the possibility of a practical law in the sensible world.”]

See too p. 71: “Gott ist, laut der Vernunftpostulate, also dasjenige Wesen zu denken, welches die Natur dem Moralgesetze gemäß bestimmt. In ihm also ist die Vereinigung beider Gesetzgebungen, und seiner Welt-Anschauung liegt jenes Princip, von welchem sie beide gemeinschaftlich abhängen, zum Grunde.” [“God is to be thought of, in accordance with the postulates of reason, as that being who determines nature in conformity with the moral law. In him, therefore, is

are deducible a priori in the same way as God's existence: God possesses precisely those attributes that are required for the possibility of conceiving of him as the supersensible ground of spirit and nature: (necessary) existence, holiness, justice, omnipotence, omniscience, and supreme legislative and judicial power.²⁰

Postulating the supersensible unity of freedom and nature in God not only allows us to view nature *überhaupt* as an "appearance of freedom," but also provides us with an a priori warrant for viewing certain appearances *within* nature as at once "freely produced" (whether by God or by our own free will, as mediated by God's providential arrangement of the natural order) and yet fully in accord with the laws of nature. The same event can therefore be viewed, from the perspective of practical reason, as morally necessary and freely produced, and from the standpoint of theoretical reason, as part of nature's causal web. With this proposal Fichte is clearly attempting to develop an obscure, "compatibilist" suggestion put forward by Kant in his discussion of the Third Antinomy. In an effort to clarify the compatibility of practical freedom and natural necessity, Fichte introduces an equally obscure distinction of his own between events that can be explain "aus der Natur" (or "from nature") and those that can be explained only "durch die Natur" (or "in accordance with nature".) A sensible appearance of freedom could thus be interpreted as occurring "nach Naturgesetzen" but incapable of explanation "aus den Gesetzen der Natur."²¹ (I cannot refrain from noting, if only in passing, that this "solution" to the antinomy of nature and freedom is not without serious problems of its own, not the least of which is that it is hard to avoid concluding from Fichte's argument that the real author of the sensible appearances of

the union of both legislations, and that principle on which they mutually depend underlies his world view."] See too, pp. 27-28.

²⁰ See pp. 49 and 79.

²¹ See pp. 70-72. Fichte attempts to illuminate this obscure distinction by introducing a further, and even more obscure distinction, between "the causality of the matter" and "the causality of the form." This effort, though welcome, is not particularly helpful.

my free acts is not me, but God, and that it is only *God's* freedom that can be reconciled with natural causality. Such "divine compatibalism," however, seems to owe more to Leibniz or Malebranche than to Kant, though it might have been suggested to Fichte by certain passages in the third *Critique*.²²)

Returning to our topic, let us briefly consider the epistemic status of the postulates we have now "deduced." Perhaps the most important such feature is the one that is most important for practical purposes: namely, their *certainty*. However problematic it may appear from the standpoint of purely theoretical reason, "[e]ines Gottes Existenz ist," according to Fichte, "eben so gewiß anzunehmen, als ein Sittengesetz. – Es ist ein Gott."²³ The postulated causality of the will and immortality of the individual possess a similar certainty. Such certainty, however, is not immediate, but is based upon an inference that begins with an immediately certain, original "datum" or "Tatsache" of practical reason. Theoretical as well as practical reason must therefore be involved in discovering the Ideas of reason and in postulating their reality.²⁴ In other words, the deduction of the

²² See pp. 28-29, where God is postulated as the true determiner of the effects produced by the causality of the individual's moral will.

²³ 2nd ed., p. 21n. ["The assumption of the existence of God is therefore just as certain as the moral *law*. It is a God."]

See too p. 104: "Hier wurde also ein Begriff, dessen Gültigkeit vorher schlechterdings problematische war, nicht durch theoretische Beweisgründe, sondern um einer Bestimmung des Begehrungsvermögens willen realisiert." ["A concept whose validity was previously utterly problematic was therefore here realized not by any theoretical proof, but for the sake of determination of the faculty of desire."]

²⁴ "Durch das Gesetz der practischen Vernunft aber wurde uns zum Zwecke unsrer Willensform ein Endzweck aufgestellt, dessen Möglichkeit für uns nur unter Voraussetzung der Realität jenes Begriffs denkbar war; und da wir diesen Endzweck schlechterdings wollen, *mithin auch theoretisch seine Möglichkeit annehmen mußten*, so mußten wir auch zugleich die Bedingungen desselben, die Existenz Gottes, und die aus Verbindung seines Begriffs mit dem Begriffe endlicher moralischer Wesen erfolgende Unsterblichkeit der Seele annehmen" (p. 104; emphasis added). ["Through the law of practical reason, however, a final purpose was established for us for the sake of the form of our

postulates is a product of rational *reflection* upon the problem of how freedom and the moral law can be applied to a finite rational-sensible being. Though Fichte never makes this point explicitly, it is clear that his “deductions” in the *Versuch* are instances or products of “reflective judgment” (*reflektierende Urteilskraft*).

Following Kant’s lead, Fichte employs the term *Glaube* (“belief” or “faith”) to describe the epistemic status of the postulates. In order to act freely and to will in accordance with the moral law we must *believe* in the causality of our will, and hence in God and in our own immortality. Such beliefs or articles of faith must never be confused with arbitrary opinions, for they are both absolutely *certain* and absolutely *necessary*. On pain of self-contraction, we cannot will to act morally without presupposing the causality of the will, etc.; and we must act morally. Hence we *must* affirm the reality of the postulated objects. “Belief” or “Glaube” can therefore be defined more precisely as “ein solches Annehmen [...], zu dem die Möglichkeit der Anerkennung eines Gesetzes überhaupt uns nöthigt.”²⁵

However “necessary” and “certain” they may be, such beliefs must be carefully distinguished not only from objective theoretical knowledge claims,²⁶ but also from immediate practical conviction concerning the reality of one’s own freedom and the requirements of the moral law. Whereas we

will, the possibility of which was thinkable for us only on the presupposition of the reality of that concept. And since we will this final purpose absolutely, *and therefore had to assume its possibility theoretically as well*, we simultaneously had to assume the conditions of the same: viz., the existence of God and immortality of the soul, which follows from joining the concept of God with the concept of finite moral beings.”]

²⁵ 2nd ed., p. 22n. [“An assumption that we have to make in order to acknowledge any law whatsoever we call a *belief*.”]

²⁶ Moreover, since (according to Fichte’s argument) the postulates are ultimately based purely upon a determination of the will, and not upon any sort of empirical experience or reflection upon the possibility of the same, belief in the reality of their objects must never be confused with theoretical knowledge; indeed, it is precisely this confusion that has generated the entire tradition of dogmatic theology and metaphysics. See pp. 108-9.

have an absolute practical obligation to the latter, and are hence “bound” (*verbunden*) by it, the same cannot be said of belief in the postulates. Though they are just as universal and just as “necessary” as the moral law itself, they remain *theorems*, and, as such, can never be *practically binding* upon anyone.²⁷

Though the moral law is just as “objective” as the laws of nature (albeit in a practical, rather than theoretical sense of “objectivity”), the postulates are only “subjectively necessary,” for they are concerned only with the possibility of applying the moral law to *finite* rational beings like ourselves. Hence they are postulated only in relation to our “subjective constitution” (*Beschaffenheit*.) But since they are not based upon empirical generalizations but are instead deduced a priori from the general concept of finite moral agency, these same postulates are “universally valid” (*allgemeingültig*) for all such agents.²⁸

In order to highlight the distinctive epistemic character of belief in the postulates, and to contrast it with our immediate “belief” in the moral law, Fichte describes the former as “hypothetical” or “subjective,” rather than “categorical” or

²⁷ See p. 32. This is explained most clearly in a note to the second edition, p. 22n: “Diese Sätze nennen wir, als mit der Anforderung der Vernunft uns endlichen Wesen ein practisches Gesetz zu geben, unmittelbar verbunden, und vor ihr unzertrennliche, *Postulate* der Vernunft. Nemlich diese Sätze werden nicht etwa durch das Gesetz *geboten*, welches ein *practisches* Gesetz für *Theoreme* nicht kann, sondern sie müssen nothwendig angenommen werden, wenn die Vernunft gesetzgebend seyn soll.” [“We call these propositions postulates of reason, for they are immediately connected with, and inseparable from, the demand of reason to provide us finite beings with a practical *law*. I.e., these propositions are not commanded by the moral law, which a *practical* law cannot do in the case of theorems; but they must necessarily be assumed if reason is to be legislative.”]

Fichte notes that we can employ human ways of speaking in our deduction of the postulates, and specifically in describing God’s relationship to the world, “da wir hier nicht objective Wahrheiten, sondern subjective Denkmöglichkeiten aufstellen” [“since we are not here establishing objective truths, but subjective possibilities of thought”] (p. 71).

²⁸ 2nd ed., p. 22 n.

“objective.” Though they can be described as certain, universal, and necessary, propositions concerning God and the Ideas of reason are not “objectively valid (*gültig*) and necessary in themselves.”²⁹ They are necessary only for creatures like ourselves and thus possess only *subjective validity*. When we assume – as we must – the reality if the final goal of our willing, we do so “nicht durch objective Gründe gedrungen, sondern durch die nothwendige Bestimmung unsers Begehrungsvermögens, seine Wirklichkeit zu wollen, bewogen.”³⁰

One must always, of course, bear in mind the *limits* such an account places upon the domain of rationally justifiable belief, which includes only freedom and the moral law itself, along with the postulates concerning the causality of the will, the existence of God (understood as possessing those divine attributes – and only those attributes – that can be deduced from the practical law) and the immortality of the finite moral agent.³¹ No matter how practically certain and necessary they may be, such beliefs are only subjectively valid and should therefore never be employed as a basis for objective, theoretical knowledge claims.

According to Fichte, the proper name for a doctrine of the postulates in this sense is “*theology*,” the primary purpose of which is not to extend our speculative knowledge, but rather to consider how we must think in order to avoid a painful – indeed, morally debilitating – contradiction be-

²⁹ p. 19n.

³⁰ p. 19. [“... not compelled by objective grounds, but moved by the necessary determination of our faculty of desire to will its actuality.”] For discussion of the “universal, certain, necessary, and subjective” character of all propositions concerning the postulates of reason, see pp. 22 and 36, 85, and 98, as well as p. 119, where Fichte remarks that “von der Realität aller Ideen vom Uebersinnlichen keine objective Gewißheit, sondern nur ein Glaube an sie stattfindet” [“there is no objective certainty about the reality of any Ideas of the supersensuous but only a faith in them”], a faith based on a determination of the faculty of the desire – of the higher faculty of desire in the case of God and immortality and of the lower faculty of desire in the case of providence and revelation.

³¹ See p. 79.

tween our theoretical convictions and the practical determination of our will.³² Insofar as theology actually achieves its essentially practical aim it is identical to “*religion*,”³³ or rather, to “purely rational religion.”

Without delving into the rather arcane and not entirely consistent details of Fichte’s typology of religion in the *Ver-such* – with its distinctions between “purely rational religion,” “natural religion,” and “revealed religion”³⁴ – let us pass quickly over the other varieties and concentrate upon the lowest form of the same, revealed religion, so that we can then turn our attention to Fichte’s deduction of the concept of revelation (*Offenbarung*). “Religion,” in the proper sense of the term (as distinguished from theology or purely rational religion), is distinguished by its efforts to address man’s needs as a sensible-rational being, and hence to find sensible expressions of practical reason’s deepest and purest certainties (the postulates). Its goal is thoroughly practical: to *help* human beings think and behave morally. To the extent that all human beings require some such assistance, religion is a universal phenomenon and, as such, strives for the most universally accessible and applicable *Versinnlich-ungen*, while making the smallest possible concessions to sensibility. Such a universal religion can also be called “natural religion.”

(It is fascinating to record, again, if only in passing, Fichte’s precocious recognition that every form of religion in the proper sense of the term, including the most abstract

³² See p. 23.

³³ In § 2 of the 1st ed. Fichte introduces a rather labored distinction between theology and religion, in which the latter is understood as the practical application of the former. However, he immediately undermines this distinction when he admits that the whole point of the kind of “theology” he endorses lies in its practical efficacy.

Note that Fichte’s strongly “practical” interpretation of religion definitely *antedates* his first reading of. Indeed, even during his student years, he had little interest in the purely doctrinal side of religion or theology and was always strongly inclined to interpret religion in the context of moral practice.

³⁴ For Fichte’s classification(s) of religion, see pp. 23, 28, 30, 36, 40, 53–56, and 91.

varieties of “natural religion,” involves an unavoidable element of “alienation” (*Entäußerung*), inasmuch as it considers what is in fact profoundly “subjective” – viz., our own moral self-legislation – to be grounded upon something outside the subject: namely, God.³⁵ Such alienation can be truly effective, however, only if one already possesses some degree of pure respect for the moral law, or at least some capacity for the same.)

Religion, however, can also go beyond the general needs of sensible-rational moral beings and can address itself to the *particular* needs of specific individuals, peoples, and ages – or, more accurately, to the specific moral *weaknesses* of the same, the most prevalent of which is a total or relative impotence of the higher faculty of desire and an attendant slavery to sensibility. Though one cannot deduce this a priori from any higher principle, it is nevertheless a simple fact of experience that many – if, indeed, not all – individuals, peoples and ages suffer from such a weakness. To address this need is the distinctive task of *revealed religion*.

Fichte’s understanding of the nature of religion in general and of the task of revealed religion in particular is reflected in his narrow definition of the concept of revelation (*Offenbarung*) as “der Begriff von einer durch die Causalität Gottes in der Sinnenwelt bewirkten Erscheinung, wodurch er sich als moralischen Gesetzgeber ankündigt.”³⁶ A revelation is a

³⁵ See pp. 33-34. For Fichte, it remains a purely empirical question whether or not there might be human beings who are able to act out of pure respect for the moral law without requiring the external “crutch” of natural or revealed religion. That Fichte believes such cases are in fact possible is clear from certain remarks about the respect due to such moral exemplars. See p. 24 and p. 68-69.

³⁶ p. 48 [... “the concept of an appearance produced in the sensible world by the causality of God, through which he proclaims himself as moral lawgiver.”] See too p. 41: “Der Begriff der Offenbarung ist also ein Begriff von einer durch übernatürliche Causalität von Gott in der Sinnenwelt hervorgebrachten Wirkung, durch welche er sich als moralischen Gesetzgeber ankündigt.” [“The concept of revelation is therefore the concept of an effect produced by God in the sensible world by means of supernatural causality, by means of which he proclaims himself to be the moral lawgiver.”]

particular appearance within nature that one cannot explain by natural laws and therefore interprets as produced by God.³⁷ The purpose of Fichte's careful deduction of the *possibility* of revelation is to show that such an interpretation is warranted *only* when the *content* conveyed by the alleged revelation is the moral law and its postulates.³⁸ And even when this criterion has been met, the actual function of any revelation is strictly circumscribed by the fundamental practical stricture on moral heteronomy. Even in the case of the most hardened sensualist, who seems unable to act morally without some external assistance, all that a revelation can do is help him become explicitly aware of his own practical freedom and assist him in recognizing the moral law. It still remains up to him to apply this law freely to himself.³⁹

This narrow definition is simply a further specification of the more general or nominal definition of revelation as "einer Gegenmittheilung zwischen höhern Wesen, und Menschen" ["a reciprocal communication between higher beings and men"] (p. 18). This further specification is required by Fichte's deduction of religion in general from the principle of practical reason. Accordingly, in the second edition a revelation is first defined as "eine Wahrnehmung, die von Gott, gemäß dem Begriffe irgend einer dadurch zu begebenden Belehrung, (was auch immer ihr Stoff seyn möge) als *Zweck* derselben, in uns bewirkt war" ["a perception produced in us by God, in accordance with the concept of some teaching that is to be imparted by this means (whatever its content may be), as the *purpose* of the same"] (p. 157). This "purpose" must always be that of morality itself.

³⁷ The following discussion ignores Fichte's elaborate distinction between the various types of "internal" and "external" revelation and concentrates instead upon the latter: revelation as a appearance in the external world, which is, as Fichte notes, the most usual sense of this term. See pp. 38-40.

³⁸ See p. 82.

³⁹ Thus Fichte remarks: "Sollen nun solche Wesen in diesem Falle der Moralität nicht gänzlich unfähig werden, so muß ihre sinnliche Natur selbst, durch sinnliche Antriebe bestimmt werden, sich durch das Moralgesez bestimmen zu lassen" (p. 47). ["If such beings are not to become wholly incapable of morality in this case, their sensuous nature itself must be determined by sensuous stimuli to let itself be determined by the moral law." "[D]ie moralische Bestimmung des Willens soll dadurch nicht geschehen, sondern nur erleichtert werden" (p. 88).

That there is a certain circularity implicit in this concept of revelation is freely conceded by Fichte: On the one hand, only a being who already possesses a sufficient degree of moral consciousness to be able to recognize that the teaching conveyed by a revelation is identical to that of pure practical reason can actually identify a particular appearance as a revelation. On the other hand, revelation is supposed to address the specific needs of those who require sensible assistance in order to acquire moral consciousness in the first place. Hence, as Fichte notes, it seems as if it is only *after* we have profited from a revelation that we are able to recognize it as a revelation.⁴⁰ This echo of the Socratic paradox of learning points to a quasi-circularity that seems unavoidable in any account of moral education that emphasizes the crucial role of freedom. The question of how the hardened sensualist can recognize a revelation is no more difficult – and no easier – to answer than the related question of how those who is not already free can become aware of their freedom. Unlike Kant, Fichte never shied away from admitting this paradox, nor did he take it as an excuse to avoid addressing the important issue of moral education. Indeed, the *Versuch* might well be viewed as Fichte's first contribution toward the development of such a theory.

As in the case of the postulates, Fichte's deduction of the concept of revelation also implies strict limits upon the content and application of the same. First of all, as we have noted, the only legitimate content or "teaching" of an alleged

["The moral determination of the will is not supposed to occur [by means of revelation], but only to be made easier."]

Even when it seems that the only effective determining ground of the will is sensible impulse, we must still suppose the presence of at least some spark of a priori awareness of the moral law, some glimmer of moral feeling. See pp. 56-59. After wrestling with this issue, Fichte finally concludes that revelation can never directly impart the moral law to anyone, but can only help draw one's attention to it, thereby, as it were, kindling the spark that is already present. It does this by using sensible means to stimulate the imagination, so that one might then become better able to hearken to the voice of God *within oneself*. See pp. 62-68.

⁴⁰ See pp. 64-65.

revelation is the moral law itself, along with the postulates of practical reason. The proper function of revelation is not to reveal new theoretical truths to humanity nor to establish distinctive social practices, but simply to contribute to the moral education of *some* human beings.⁴¹

Second, the a priori deduction of the concept of revelation establishes merely the *possibility* of a revelation; it can never prove that a revelation has ever actually occurred, only that it is not self-contradictory to believe that this has happened. Like the deduction of the postulates, the deduction of the concept of revelation is accomplished by reflecting upon the demands of the moral law in conjunction with the general concept of a finite, sensible-rational moral agent. In order to apply the concept of revelation, however, an additional act of reflective judgment is required, in which one evaluates a particular appearance in the light of the general concept of revelation. Though the deduction of the concept of revelation demonstrates with a priori certainty the possibility of a revelation, the judgment, "this is a revelation," always remains problematic.⁴²

Finally, one must never ascribe "objective validity" to any alleged revelation. However necessary such sensible appearances of the divine may be for the purposes of religion (i.e., for the purposes of moral education), they still must be recognized "als bloße Herablassung zu unserm *subjectiven Bedürfniss*."⁴³ Hence their validity is purely *subjective* as well. The Ideas of reason affirmed in the postulates also possess merely *subjective validity*, but they possess a degree of *certainty*, *universality*, and *necessity* which the concept of revelation and every application of the same conspicuously lack. The concept of revelation lacks the *universality* and *necessity* of the postulates, because this concept cannot be de-

⁴¹ "Mit theoretischen Beweisen hat eine Offenbarung es überhaupt nicht zu thun, und sobald sie sich auf diese einläßt, ist sie nicht mehr Religion, sondern Physik" (p. 96). ["A revelation has nothing whatsoever to do with theoretical proofs, and as soon as it engages in them it is no longer religion but physics."] See too pp. 72 and 78.

⁴² p. 103. See too p. 49.

⁴³ p. 92. ["... as a mere concession to our *subjective need*."]

duced from the general concept of finite moral agency, but only from the concept of a particular *kind* of human being, one whose pure will is dominated by sensible desires. Thus, whereas the postulates are “absolutely necessary” for everyone, revelation is necessary only for *some* (weak-willed) people, and one can at least imagine human beings who wholly lack any concept of revelation.⁴⁴

Though the postulates and the concept of revelation can both be described as “*subjectively valid*,” the subjectivity of the latter differs from that of the former. Both are “subjective” in the sense that they are mere “Ideas,” ultimately grounded by reflection upon the highest principles of subjectivity (freedom and the moral law).⁴⁵ Revelation, however, is also “subjective” in two additional senses: first, in the sense that an actual revelation is always a sensible appearance, and as such will vary from circumstance to circumstance in ways that cannot be determined in advance⁴⁶; second (and as already noted), in the sense that the concept of revelation is valid and necessary only for *some*, but not all human beings.⁴⁷

Such consideration introduce a certain *ambiguity* into Fichte’s notion of “subjective validity,” which is in turn reflected in his comments on the proper sphere of “belief” or “rational faith.” Though one can legitimately speak of the necessity of *Glaube* in the case of a revelation, the necessity in question is strictly limited to the *content* of the same (viz., the moral law and the postulates) and does not extend to its *form* (viz., the assertion that a particular sensible appear-

⁴⁴ See p. 104.

⁴⁵ Actually, Fichte seems uncertain about whether to describe the concept of revelation as an “Idea of reason” at all. Sometimes (e.g., in § 5 of the first edition) he appears to reserve this term only for the postulates, but at others he describes the concept of revelation as an “Idee.” See, e.g., p. 49. Note too that he proposed to title his unfinished treatise on revelation, providence, and miracles, “Critique of the Ideas of Reason.”

⁴⁶ See p. 109.

⁴⁷ See pp. 34-36 and 49-50.

ance has a supernatural cause).⁴⁸ With respect to the claim that "this is a revelation" one can harbor only a rational "*wish*" (*Wunsch*) and not a necessary belief: something, according to Fichte, that is "true for" *some* of us, but not for *all* of us.

Having at last arrived at the point from which I have taken my title, let me pause to consider more closely Fichte's proposed distinction between "belief" in the postulates and the "wish" for a revelation. The difference in question is ultimately based upon the different "motives" (*Momente*) for affirming the reality of the postulated Ideas and the reality of a revelation. According to Fichte, one affirms the existence of God, for example, purely "for the sake of the form of our will," i.e., in order to avoid the previously discussed practical contradiction between one's moral willing and one's concept of reality. The Idea of God can be assumed to be present in everyone, since it is something "given a priori by our reason." Everyone, therefore, also has a *practical responsibility* to affirm the existence of an object corresponding to this concept. The "motive" for such an affirmation lies in the higher faculty of desire alone, from which Fichte concludes that the postulates are "absolutely necessary for us."⁴⁹

In contrast, the "motive" for affirming a revelation does not lie wholly in the pure will, but rather in the requirement that one determine the lower faculty of desire (sensuous impulse) in accordance with the dictates of the higher (pure will), combined with a recognition that one is, in fact, unable to do this without some external assistance. The lower faculty has to will whatever means are necessary for achieving the end willed absolutely by the higher faculty of desire, and among such hypothetical means is revelation, understood as a sensible representation of the Idea of what is most holy. Once the various material and formal criteria have been satisfied, the lower faculty is not only permitted, but is even required (albeit hypothetically) to will the reality of the con-

⁴⁸ See p. 81, where Fichte explains why rational faith is not possible in anything obtained *solely* through revelation.

⁴⁹ See p. 104.

cept of revelation and to be prepared to recognize a particular sensible appearance as a product of divine causality.⁵⁰ But again, according to Fichte, the proper name for any determination of the lower faculty of desire to will the reality of something that it is itself unable to produce is "*wishing*."⁵¹

Not all wishes, of course, are justified or necessary. So what justifies the "wish" to affirm the reality of revelation, and what prevents this from being an obvious case of "wishful thinking" on the part of needy creatures like ourselves? Fichte answers this question as follows:

Wenn ein bloßer Wunsch uns berechtigen soll, die Realität seines Objects anzunehmen, so muß derselbe sich auf die Bestimmung des obern Begehrungsvermögens durchs Moralgesetz gründen, und durch dieselbe entstanden seyn; die Annahme der Wirklichkeit seines Objects muß uns die Ausübung unserer Pflichten, und zwar nicht etwa bloß dieser oder jener, sondern des pflichtmäßigen Verhaltens überhaupt erleichtern, und von der Annahme des Gegentheils muß sich zeigen lassen, daß sie dieses pflichtmäßige Verhalten in den wünschenden Subjecten erschweren würde; und dieses darum, weil wir über die Wirklichkeit seines Objects überhaupt etwas annehmen, und die Frage über dieselbe nicht gänzlich abweisen wollen.⁵²

⁵⁰ See p. 105.

⁵¹ See pp. 104-5, as well as the formulation in the 2nd ed., p. 105n: "Eine Bestimmung durchs untere Begehrungsvermögen die Realität einer Vorstellung zu wollen, deren Gegenstand man nicht selbst hervorbringen kann, ist, sie sey auch bewirkt durch was sie wolle, ein *Wunsch*." ["A determination by means of the lower faculty of desire to will a representation, the object of which one cannot produce by oneself, is called a *wish*, no matter how it is produced."]

⁵² pp. 105-6. ["If a mere wish is to justify us in assuming the reality of its object, it must be based on the determination of the higher faculty of desire by the moral law and must have arisen by means of this determination. Assuming the actuality of its object must help us to perform our duties – and it must facilitate not just this or that duty, but dutiful behavior in general. Moreover, it must also be possible to show that the opposite assumption (viz., that the wished for object does not exist) would impede this dutiful behavior in the wishing subjects, since only with a wish of this sort can we supply any reason why we would want to assume anything at all concerning the reality of its object instead of dismissing the question completely."]

This, of course, is predicated upon a prior determination that no theoretical knowledge of the object in question is possible, a restriction that guarantees that the wish in question will involve no theoretical error.⁵³ A wish that does not meet all these criteria is dismissed by Fichte as a idle "hope."⁵⁴ Whereas Kant dismisses wishes in general as self-contradictory desires, which are unable to produce their objects,⁵⁵ Fichte relegates such wishes to the level of mere "hopes" and focuses his attention upon those *subjectively valid* and hypothetically necessary *wishes*, which those who need them may, with "complete security," affirm to be "true for us."⁵⁶

Like the postulates, such wishes always involve an element of "belief" or "faith." But whereas faith in the reality of God and belief in immortality are instances of "*reiner Vernunftglaube*" and concern only the matter or content of the belief, the belief that "this is a revelation" has no distinctive object or content of its own (inasmuch as we can know in advance that the only legitimate content of an alleged revelation is the moral law and the postulates). Belief in a revelation thus concerns not the content but the *form* of the same; i.e., one asserts that one believes – or, rather, "wishes" – that a particular appearance is in fact a sensible means, chosen by God, for communicating a supersensible

⁵³ See pp. 106-7.

⁵⁴ See the footnote on this topic, pp. 107-8, in which Fichte defines hope as "eine durch eine Bestimmung des Begehrungsvermögens motivirte Hineigung des Gemüths auf eine Seite bey einem Gegenstande, der übrigens als problematisch erkannt wird" ["an inclination of the mind, motivated by a determination of the faculty of desire, in a direction and towards an object that is also recognized to be problematic"], and then illustrates this with the example of one's hope to meet deceased persons in the infinite future.

⁵⁵ See the note on the subject in the Introduction to the *Kritik der Urteilkraft* (1790, ²1793, ³1799). *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, hrsg. von der preußischen, später deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: De Gruyter 1900sq.) Bd. 5, 13 f.

⁵⁶ pp. 106-7.

truth. Such a rationally justified wish may therefore be described as “*formale(n)[r]*, *empirisch bedingte(n)[r]* Glaube(n).”⁵⁷

As we have observed, purely rational faith in the postulates is based upon an a priori determination of the faculty of desire, combined with a reflective recognition on the part of the finite moral agent that his own actions and nature are also subject to natural laws. But sincere moral action presupposes a practical certainty that the infinite difference between spirit and nature can be overcome, which is what the postulates assert. The latter are therefore *universally (albeit subjectively) valid* for all finite rational beings. Though no one can be compelled to believe, for example, that God exists, such a belief can nevertheless be legitimately “demanded” of (*fordert*) and “expected” from (*ansinnen*) everyone, and in this sense belief in the postulates is absolutely *necessary* for every finite moral agent.⁵⁸ Since such a belief can be arrived at by pure reflection, without any reference to any particular experience, it can be described as a *completely a priori faith*.

In contrast, any formal, empirically conditioned faith (or rather, “wish”) concerning an alleged revelation is necessary only for those finite rational beings whose higher faculty of desire is dominated or suppressed by the lower, sensible faculty. Moreover, the a priori concept of revelation can be applied only on the particular occasion of a certain, otherwise inexplicable appearance within the sensible world. Thus, even if there are (empirical) grounds for thinking that all human beings have a need for revelation, this is not a conclusion that can be deduced directly from the a priori concept of a finite rational being. Nor is there any reason to expect that all such beings will actually have experiences of the sort that would permit them to apply the concept of revelation. For these reasons, the validity of such “wishes” is not as universal as that of the postulates, and belief in reve-

⁵⁷ p. 108. [“Purely rational faith vs. formal, empirically conditioned faith.”]

⁵⁸ p. 110.

lation cannot be legitimately demanded or expected of everyone.⁵⁹

Though the similarities between the postulates and the concept of revelation are striking, Fichte is more concerned to emphasize their *differences*, many of which he traces to the fundamental difference between concepts, such as that of revelation, which are "made" or constructed (*gemacht*) by human beings, and others, such as the Idea of God, that are alleged to be "given a priori by our reason"⁶⁰ or "given through some datum of pure reason."⁶¹ This distinction, however, is plagued with difficulties. First of all, it seems misleading to describe concepts such as that of the causality of the will or the Idea of God as immediately "given" to pure reason, which implies a mysterious, pure "receptivity" on reason's part. The term "intellektuelle Anschauung" does not occur in the *Versuch*; and even if it did, it would have to be reserved to describe the mind's absolute "receptivity" to the moral law, or its original self-consciousness of its own freedom and identity, and not any postulate that might subsequently be grounded upon this original "datum." Indeed, Fichte's own deduction of the postulates clearly shows that they are not originally "given" to reason at all, but are actively produced or "discovered" by *rational reflection* upon

⁵⁹ See pp. 108-110.

⁶⁰ "Der Begriff von Gott nemlich war a priori durch unsre Vernunft gegeben" (p. 104). ["The concept of God, namely, was given a priori through our reason."] "Wir haben nemlich von Gott nur einen moralischen, durch die reine practische Vernunft gegebenen Begriff" (p. 100). ["We have, namely, only a moral concept of God, given through pure reason."] "Der Begriff von Gott nemlich ist schon a priori völlig bestimmt gegeben" (p. 109). ["The concept of God, namely, is already given as fully determined a priori."]

⁶¹ "[Der Begriff der Offenbarung] kündigt sich ferner nicht als gegeben, sondern als gemacht an, (conceptus non datus, sed ratiocinatus,) sie hat mithin kein Datum der reinen Vernunft aufzuzeigen, wodurch er uns gegeben würde, welches sie zu leisten auch nicht vorgegeben hat" (p. 49). ["Furthermore, it proclaims itself not as given, but rather as made (conceptus non datus, sed rationcinatus); the deduction [of the concept of revelation] thus has no datum of pure reason to exhibit, by means of which it would be given to us, nor does it pretend to accomplish this."] See too pp. 104, and 110.

the tension between our pure duties and our sensible nature. Here again, if one had to name that *Vermögen* of the mind through which we become acquainted with the Ideas of reason, it would not be any obscure power of supersensible or intellectual receptivity, but rather, the profoundly *constructive* power of *reflektierende Urteilstkraft*.

Why then does Fichte insist that the Ideas in question must be “given to pure reason” and not constructed, like the concept of revelation? The answer, I think, lies in his assumption that only a concept that is “given” and not merely “made” can be truly “necessary” to the human mind.⁶² If one makes such an assumption then it follows that the only way to defend the universality and necessity of the postulates would be to show that these Ideas are “given a priori.” But it is no more than a dogmatic prejudice to assume that genuine universality and necessity can be accounted for only by reference to something “given.” As Fichte himself would eventually realize, one of Kant’s most revolutionary insights concerns precisely the possibility of giving an account of universality and necessity in terms of the *necessary actions of the mind* – and the necessary *products* of the same.

Equally un-Kantian or pre-Critical is Fichte’s distinction between “objectively” and “subjectively” valid judgments. Whereas Kant himself had no reservations about affirming the objectivity not only of the moral law, but also of the pos-

⁶² See Fichte’s description of the concept of revelation is a “nicht gegeben, sondern gemachten Begriff, der mithin nicht nothwendig im menschlichen Gemüthe ist” [“concept that is not given, but made, and that is therefore not necessarily present in the human mind”] (p. 110).

See too the quadripartite division of epistemic modes, in descending order of universality, necessity, and certainty: (1) *Knowing*, which possesses objective validity and produces theoretical conviction. The *Ver-such* itself, along with all transcendental philosophy, possesses this kind of universal, objective validity. (2) *Belief* or *faith*, which possesses universal, subjective validity. The postulates possess this sort of validity. (3) *Wishing*, or formal, empirically conditioned faith, which possesses non-universal subjective validity. This is the kind possessed by the wish for a revelation. (4) *Hoping*, which possesses no validity at all, but is purely subjective. Such “hopes” are testable only by pragmatic means and by wagers. See pp. 105-15 and 119-21.

tulates of practical reason,⁶³ Fichte insists that these can attain to no more than “subjective, universal” validity, and apparently wishes to reserve the term “objective” to describe theoretical truths and the “fact” of (practical) reason.⁶⁴ When one consults his earlier, unpublished writings from the period prior to his first reading of Kant, one encounters the same distinction between “subjective” and “objective” validity that appears in the *Versuch*,⁶⁵ a distinction that is closely related to the distinction between concepts that are “given” and those that are merely “constructed.” Both of these examples suggest that at this point Fichte’s thinking was still marked by vestiges of dogmatic rationalism and that he had not yet fully absorbed the lessons of the Copernican revolution in philosophy nor grasped all the implications of Kant’s re-definitions of “reason” and of “objectivity.”⁶⁶

⁶³ See the many passages in the second Critique where Kant refers to the “objective reality” or “objective validity” of the postulates. Though such claims may, when compared with theoretical judgments, appear to possess only subjective validity, practical reason also possesses objective validity in its own right. See *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag 1990), pp. 3-5, 58, 66-67, 154 f. Re. the objective reality of Ideas of freedom, God and immortality, see p. 30; re. the objective and not merely subjective necessity of practical laws, see pp. 56-57; re. the objective, though merely practical, validity of practical reason and its Ideas, see pp. 154 ff.

In contrast to Fichte, Kant reserves the terms “subjective necessity” and “subjective validity” to describe theoretical judgments based upon empirical generalization and habit (see pp. 13 ff.).

⁶⁴ There is at least one exception to this in the *Versuch*, namely, a passage on p. 96, where Fichte contrasts the “subjective necessity” of the concept of revelation, which is valid only for certain human beings, with the “objective validity” of those Ideas (the postulates) that can be shown to be valid for everyone.

⁶⁵ See, for example, Fichte’s employment of the distinction between “subjective” and “objective” validity in a vain attempt to overcome the tension between “heart” and “head” (the claims of genuine “religion” vs. those of speculative “deism”) in his “Aphorismen über Religion und Deismus,” in which the claims of the former are assigned “subjective validity” and those of the latter “objective validity” (GA II/1:290).

⁶⁶ This was also the verdict of one of Fichte’s earliest critics, Gottlieb Ernst Schulze (a.k.a., “Aenesidemus”), who, in his anonymously-

In any case, Fichte's argument for the "subjective validity" of the postulates amounts to this: such claims possess only a "hypothetical" and not a categorical validity, because they are grounded only upon certain features of our own "subjective constitution." (*subjective Beschaffenheit*), from which it supposedly follows that we must, on pain of self-contradiction, assume the reality of the highest good in order to will and to act freely. "Objectively necessary" propositions, in contrast, must make no reference to the "constitution" of the subject, but must be "objectively valid and necessary in themselves."⁶⁷ Though such a way of drawing the distinction between objectively and subjectively valid propositions is fairly unproblematic within the context of the Enlightened rationalism in which Fichte was schooled, it is deeply at odds with the spirit of the new transcendental philosophy, which shows that even the principles of theoretical reason are profoundly "subjective," in the sense that they are grounded upon the "subjective constitution" of finite, rational subjects. From this it would seem to follow that *none* of the truths discernible by such subjects can aspire to more than "hypothetical" validity and necessity.⁶⁸ Kant, of course, drew no such conclusion, but instead proposed a radically new theory concerning "objective validity."

published review of the *Versuch* in the *Neue allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek* (1793) [rpt. in *J. G. Fichte in zeitgenössischen Rezensionen*, hrsg. E. Fuchs, W.G. Jacobs, and W. Schieche, Bd. 1, pp. 69-116 (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: frommann-holzboog 1996)], maintained that "die Principien, worauf in [der Fichtesche *Versuch*] die Theorie der Offenbarung gegründet wird, sind durchaus nicht Kantisch" (p. 111) and "daß die in der Kritik aller Offenbarung herrschende Methode zu philosophiren keineswegs die Kantische sey" (p. 115).

⁶⁷ See p. 19n.

⁶⁸ That this really was Fichte's view at this point is confirmed by a passage in § 6 of first edition, in which he offers a general summary of our "condition," and concludes that, though our supersensible nature provides us with "glimpses of cognition" [*Ansichten auf Erkenntnisse*] of a higher world, we are able to think of the latter only under the conditions of human knowledge (intuitions and concepts), and hence in a manner that is valid only "subjectively" and not "objectively" (p. 52).

According to Fichte, one of the most important difference between the Idea of God and the concept of revelation is that requires no empirical data in order to affirm the existence of God, whereas one does require a certain empirical acquaintance with a particular type of human neediness before one can construct for oneself the concept of revelation, and one also has to have a concrete experience of a very particular kind in order to apply this concept. As previously noted, both the postulates and the concept of revelation are ultimately grounded upon the same pure a priori datum: our immediate awareness of our own freedom or of the moral law. Both also require, or so I have argued, additional acts of reflection, in which the pure will is related to certain other features of our nature: in the case of the postulates, it is related to the character of sensibility in general in combination with the demands of pure willing; in addition to this, in the case of the concept of revelation, pure willing is also related to the particular strength of some people's sensible desires and the relative weakness of their will.⁶⁹

Fichte's claim to the contrary notwithstanding, neither the postulates nor the concept of revelation is "deduced" purely and entirely from the pure will or higher faculty of desire. Instead, both deductions require reference to the *specific, empirical needs* of certain creatures: of any finite moral agent whatsoever, in the case of the postulates, and of those finite moral agents whose sensibility dominates their practical will, in the case of revelation. Though this is a

⁶⁹ This is not to deny another important difference between the concept of revelation and the postulates. As Fichte points out, the a priori concept of revelation is not fully determinate, since it always refers to the possibility of a particular appearance, the specific character of which can never be determined a priori, but must always be a matter of sensible experience. In this respect, the concept of revelation does indeed differ from that of God: for not only do we have a purely a priori warrant for asserting the existence of God, but we can also fully determine the content of our concept of God (insofar as we can determine it at all) purely a priori, merely by reflecting upon the demands of the moral law. (See pp. 109-110.) This difference, however, does not warrant Fichte's claim the former is "constructed" and the latter "given."

significant difference, it is not a difference between a “pure” and an “impure” concept or between one that is simply “given” and one that is “constructed;” instead, it is only a difference of *scope*. I therefore conclude that the same considerations that led Fichte to describe belief in revelation as a matter of (justified) “wishing” apply equally well to faith in God and to the other postulates of practical reason.

Though Fichte, like Kant, certainly *claims* that it is “utterly necessary” for us to think that there is a moral law-giver and that moral beings endure eternally,⁷⁰ his actual argument for this conclusion is not what he claims it to be. Though he pretends to have revealed a *formal contradiction* between respect for the moral law and not affirming the postulates of practical reason, he has actually revealed no such thing. Nor do his remarks on this subject illuminate the obscure notion of a “subjectively necessary” belief, which can be “required and expected” of everyone, but to which no one is ever “bound” (*verbunden*).⁷¹

My thesis is that Fichte’s deduction of the postulates, no less than his deduction of revelation, involves an *empirical* as well as an *a priori* claim. A key premise of this deduction is that it is simply a *psychological fact* – or, if one prefers, a contingent feature of our “subjective constitution” – that we find ourselves unable to will absolute right so long as we remain uncertain whether our actions can produce any real effect in the sensible world. Even if this premise were true, it could not be determined to be true *a priori*. The distinction between “beliefs” and “wishes” cannot therefore be grounded upon the alleged greater “purity” of the former.

⁷⁰ “Pure rational religion expresses itself apodictically according to the presupposition of the possibility of the final purpose of the moral law. That is, once it is assumed that absolute right is possible, it is utterly necessary for us to think that there is a God and that moral beings endure eternally. Faith in revelation, however, can express itself only categorically,” namely, in an assertion that “this is a revelation,” an assertion that could always be wrong, even if the error could never be demonstrated. (p. 112)

⁷¹ p. 32.

But is the empirical premise in question actually true? Or has Fichte, in maintaining that a practical belief in God is absolutely necessary on the part of any sincere moral agent, not overlooked certain other possible ways of viewing one's situation as a freely willing agent in a world governed by natural necessity? Could one not, for example, sincerely adopt a *skeptical* or *ironic* attitude toward the existence of God and still strive to determine one's will freely in accord with the moral law? Or could one adopt an attitude of *existential revolt* or *tragic resignation*? On the basis of my own experience, the answer seems to be "yes." Fichte's experience may, of course, have required a negative answer to this same question; but the point is to recognize that this is a question than can be answered only by an appeal to human experience and not by means of a priori philosophical speculation.

Fichte would probably respond by claiming that such a criticism ignores the difference between theoretical and practical reason and would insist that, though theoretical reason not only can but must suspend judgment regarding the Ideas, practical reason not only may, but *must* affirm the reality of their objects. But can we really make sense of a purely "practical" affirmation of the "reality" of anything? All the subtleties and safeguards of the Critical philosophy notwithstanding, I submit that it difficult to make sense of such claims without calling into question the fundamental Kantian *dichotomy* between theoretical and practical reason, between "the faculty of cognition" and the "faculty of desire." If one insists upon operating within this dualistic framework, then one will, I predict, eventually have to reject the entire theory of the postulates as a well-intentioned violation of the same. However pure our motives and however universal our "need": to assert the existence of God on the basis of a deduction similar to the one provided in Fichte's *Versuch* certainly seems to involve just as much "wishful thinking" on our part as does the "wish" to describe a certain event as a divine revelation. Neither of these beliefs is totally arbitrary, of course, but neither can either be justified on purely a priori, rational grounds, whether "theoretical" or "practical." At most, Fichte's arguments succeed in establishing

what he describes as “Erlaubniß etwas zu glauben, weil das Herz es wünscht,”⁷² which is, to be sure, something, but is a great deal less than he claims to have established. One cannot deny that God *might* exist or that a particular appearance *might* be a revelation; indeed, one might well find oneself *wishing* that both were the case. This, however, appears to be *all* that is actually demonstrated in Fichte’s *Versuch*.

In the end, Fichte’s only partially successful efforts to distinguish the concept of revelation from the Ideas of reason really serves to call attention to a general difficulty with the entire Critical theory of the postulates of practical reason, difficulties that cannot, I believe, be resolved without some major revisions in the Critical philosophy as a whole. Though Fichte himself may not have appreciated the full scope of such a task until many years later, I suspect that some such realization underlies his consistently *negative* evaluations of his first book. Anyone who takes such issues seriously will, I submit, eventually have to reconsider the dichotomy between theoretical and practical reason, as well as the relationship between the realms of freedom and nature. In order to resolve the problems implicit in any Critical theory of the Ideas of reason, such a person may find that he has to reconstruct the Kantian philosophy on new foundations or else construct an entirely new philosophy.

Such a philosophy might well begin with a principle that is at once theoretical and practical and demonstrate that reason can never be “practical” without also being “theoretical” – and vice versa. It might recognize that everything given is also constructed, and that every real construction is always a reconstruction of something already given. It might begin with a premise that is also a “postulate” and conclude with a postulate that is also a premise. It may recognize – *sans ressentiment* – that it can never escape from the “circle of consciousness,” even as it observes that consciousness constantly escapes from itself.

⁷² 107n. [“... the permission to believe something because the heart wishes it.”]

Perhaps it will attempt to ground every *Tatsache* in an original *Tathandlung*, while simultaneously demonstrating that the latter always requires the former. Perhaps it will discover that one of the more remarkable Ideas of reason is the Idea of philosophy itself, understood as a "real" and not merely "formal" science, and then attempt to demonstrate the reality of this Idea the old, hard, thoroughly empirical way: that is, by actually constructing such a philosophy – at a particular time, in a particular place, and in a particular language. Such a philosophy might call itself "*Wissenschaftslehre*,"⁷³ thereby raising a question we have, apparently, only begun to investigate: Isn't this just one more name for "wishful thinking?" If not, why not?

⁷³ From the perspective of 1792, of course, all this lies ahead. Nevertheless, what is important about the *Versuch* in the context of Fichte's philosophical development is that it clearly displays the firm instinct (or "sense of truth") which led him to make his authorial debut with a contribution to a theme at the heart of what would become his distinctive project: not just the theory of the postulates, but rather, the postulated unity of theoretical and practical reason, which is perhaps the central insight of the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*. Particularly revealing in this context is the so-called *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*, which explicitly begins with a "postulate" (viz., "think the I" – or "construct for yourself the concept of the I" – and "observe how you do this") and reveals a much deeper understanding on Fichte's part of the deeply "performative" aspect of the postulates.

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THE UNSATISFIED ENLIGHTENMENT
FAITH AND PURE INSIGHT
IN HEGEL'S *PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT*

LUDWIG HEYDE (†)

The famous struggle between faith and the pure insight of the Enlightenment that Hegel describes in his *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1807) has a remarkable result. The two opponents involved in this conflict, become at the end, in a certain respect, the same. As Hegel puts it: faith has become the same as the Enlightenment, that means the consciousness of the relation of the finite in itself to the absolute which is without predicates, unknown and unknowable. The defensive strategy of faith against the attacks of the emancipated understanding of the Enlightenment appears to fail. During the whole process faith is drawn in the direction of its opponent. The conception of God that faith has at the end hardly differs from the deism of the Enlightenment. This sameness of both is nevertheless not a sheer identity. An important difference consists in this: whereas the Enlightenment is satisfied with this relation to the absolute – although of course only provisionally, only up to this moment – faith on the contrary is not. It is unhappy with this result. It suffers from the indeterminacy and the absence of 'its' absolute. Therefore, Hegel calls this faith the *unsatisfied Enlightenment*. As you know, consciousness will have to go through many other experiences in order to reach the satisfaction and happiness proper to the true relation to the absolute, many experiences in order to pass from faith to true religion. Then, at the end of the process, it will be very clear that faith is only an abstract, one-sided and deficient form of the true, manifest religion.

As with many other figures in the dialectical development of consciousness in the *Phenomenology*, the struggle of faith and pure insight has not only a historical meaning. It has a significance that in part transcends the historical context of

the Enlightenment. It has therefore also relevance for a systematic philosophical reflection on the relation between faith and reason, the question on God and other subjects in the field of metaphysics and philosophy of religion. Moreover, it can also function as a hermeneutical key to come to a critical appraisal of contemporary views about human finitude and its relation to the absolute. In this sense, it can help us to realize the task Hegel ascribes to philosophy, namely “to try to grasp its own time in thoughts” (*Philosophie als ihre Zeit in Gedanken erfaßt*).

In this paper, I will not try to show all these ramifications – that would be too much for this short and modest undertaking – but I will try to make some suggestions in this direction. This will hopefully stimulate further, more fundamental thinking on the issues just mentioned. What follows now is subdivided in three parts. First, I will give a short characterization of Hegel’s conception of faith (limiting myself to the related section in the *Phenomenology*). Second, I will deal with the counterpart of faith: the pure insight of the Enlightenment, and with its struggle against faith. And third, I will offer some concluding remarks. It is not necessary to emphasize that my presentation of Hegel’s ideas will be colored by my systematic interests. But, I think, that is unavoidable when someone deals with a philosophical text and does not want simply to repeat it. That means that you have not to wait until my concluding remarks to have some impression of the way in which I think that the subject is still of relevance to us.

1. Faith as Flight from an Alienating World

Hegel uses the term *faith* (Glaube) to indicate a specific form of *religion*, namely the form religion takes within a world in which the spirit is alienated, in which the spirit no longer finds satisfaction, in which it cannot any longer be with itself in the other (*bei sich selbst sein im Anderen*). In the *Phenomenology*, the historical paradigm of such a world (the world of self-alienated spirit) is the pre-revolutionary Eu-

rope, specifically France of the seventeenth and eighteenth century. It's a world that is socially divided and economically and politically marked by a great instability. This instability concerns also moral experience and the whole ethical life. Firm values are devalued and established moral relations are dismantled. It is a world in which political power and wealth become the highest values, and at the same time appear to be vain. The awareness of the vanity of all things and values is the most important experience of this alienated world of culture (*das Reich der Bildung*). It is a world in which every position turns out to be the reverse one. Fixed distinctions do not stand. All positions are in a never-ending process of change. This unstable, vain, all-perverting and cynical world is brilliantly expressed in Diderot's novel *Le neveu de Rameau*. Hegel interprets the dialogue between the nephew of the famous composer (the bohemian) and the philosopher (Diderot) as an expression of this alienated world. With his cynical speech, the bohemian throws into disorder the fixed determinations belonging to the world of the philosopher. He says what everyone experiences and thinks but dare not say, namely, that behind all honor, virtue, generosity and honesty hides an ordinary reality: the power of money and the arrogance of wealth.

Faith is also a protest against this alienated world in so far as is itself an expression of this alienation. As will become obvious, it is internally marked by the same alienation of the world from which it is flying; this will equally be the case with the other form of protest against this world, namely, the pure insight of the Enlightenment. Faith and pure insight are the two sides of the same coin. For us philosophers, who understand the situation retrospectively, it is clear that both are involved in negating the real, actual world of culture, albeit in two different forms. In the form of consciousness, what results is the unreal world of faith; in the form of self-consciousness of the spiritual essence, what results is the movement of the self that, all-knowing and critical of everything, denies every alterity, dissolving every objectivity through the power of the thinking self. In relation to this last point, Hegel refers in the following words to Kant's celebrated saying (*Wahlspruch*) about the Enlighten-

ment: "This pure insight is thus the spirit that calls to every consciousness: be *for yourselves* what you are *in yourselves* – reasonable."¹

But now back to faith. What are the main features of it? Faith appears as a protest of the spirit against the alienation of the actual world, its vanity, its contradictions, which are present on every level of the societal life, against the lack of substantiality, in one word, against the essencelessness of the world. It flees from it and says that the genuine reality is *elsewhere*, beyond this reality, in a world that is merely thought, or, better formulated, merely represented. This other world is a divine world, a stable world of true essences, a world of goodness and salvation, the immediate opposite of the world of the here and now. Faith understands this other world to which it is directed as the world of God, the absolute, considered as mere essence, as purely in itself, as free from the ambiguities of existence, as simple interiority, as mere positive in an absolute equality with itself, as self-sufficient and in absolute rest. In all its characteristics, the world of faith is the immediate opposite of the alienated culture. Although faith is totally oriented to it, it is nevertheless unable to think its fundamental unity with it. Because of the representational form inherent in faith, faith experiences itself also as separated from the world to which it flees. It conceives 'its' absolute as elsewhere, as not present here and now. It understands it only as essence and not as spiritual actuality. This absence of what is essential appears also from the fact that God is not only beyond this world in another world, but surpasses any and all insight. In this manner, faith is caught in an opposition proper to consciousness, because there is an insurmountable gap between itself and its object. The supernatural world of God is wholly other to self-consciousness, and so, as Hegel writes "the es-

¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1807), hrsg. von J. Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag 1952) 383 [hereafter quoted as PhG followed by the page of the English translation [tr.] *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1977) 328].

sence of faith is no longer a [pure] thought, but is reduced to the level of something represented, and becomes a supersensible world which is essentially an other in relation to self-consciousness.”² Faith consist thus in the affirmation of a content that retreats from intellectual understanding. And so, it becomes an un insightful faith that necessarily is totally opposed to an unfaithful insight. By reason of this, the unrelenting struggle between faith and pure insight, characteristic of the Enlightenment, is given and cannot be avoided.

Time does not allow me to deal in detail with Hegel’s brilliant analysis of this struggle. The fight between the two parties is in fact – for us – a battle in which the one spirit engages with itself, so that in the object of its criticism the Enlightenment strikes itself. That is so because in the object of faith reason represents itself, but still in an unconscious manner. In what follows now, I limit myself to those elements that are of immediate importance for my argument.

2. Pure Insight and the Struggle of the Enlightenment with Faith

As already mentioned, pure insight is also, like faith, a critique of the alienated actual world, but it is now a critique in which the *form*, not the content, stands central. In it the spirit elevates itself above the actual world, not by virtue of another content, but through the activity of critical thought itself. Not *what* is thought, but *that* one thinks, is decisive here. That everything is subjected to the norm of critical reason, that the self and its own insight are ultimate, these are the main issues here. The Enlightenment aspires to remove the positivity from all given content and to reduce it to the concept. Dominating here is the active negativity of self-consciousness.

² PhG, 379; tr. 324.

I pass over Hegel's treatment of the form of the struggle of the Enlightenment in terms of two types (a peaceful diffusion of the ideas of the Enlightenment, a hardly noticeable all penetrating infection, or as sheer uproar and violent struggle), and instead concentrate on the content of the critique. What is at stake in the battle? With what does the pure insight reproaches faith? And why does faith appear to be so vulnerable to the critique?

In my opinion, the matter basically comes down to the working of a logic that at first sight seems strange. The critique of the Enlightenment is the result of a misunderstanding of the genuine character of religious faith, but it is nevertheless effective, because faith itself suffers from a similar misunderstanding about the true nature of religion. The effectiveness of the critique is thus the result of a *misunderstanding of a misunderstanding*. Faith is vulnerable to the critique because it is determined by the same logic of understanding (*Verstand*), which characterizes pure insight. It is a logic in which the finite and the infinite, nature and supernature, earth and heaven, immanence and transcendence exclude each other. In other words: faith succumbs to the critique because it does not see adequately the symbolic meaning of its representations; pure insight is wrong because it measures faith by its own abstract logic of understanding.

I will presently illustrate my thesis by discussing more specifically Hegel's description of the struggle. The Enlightenment reproach to faith is that it is concerned with an alien reality, something irrational and contrary to all reasonable insight. The world beyond is a strange object, absolutely foreign to self-consciousness, presented to it in a sly way by mendacious priests. In focusing on it, consciousness is palmed off with something absolute "other" in the place of its own essence.³ But the Enlightenment is not consistent in its critique. For it also declares that the object of faith is a fiction, something brought forth by consciousness itself. But by saying that, it denies the very strangeness it has criti-

³ Cf. PhG, 391-2; tr. 335.

cized in first instance. It accentuates now, in a sort of "Feuerbachianism avant la lettre" the identity of the religious consciousness with its object. In emphasizing this identity, the Enlightenment touches something what is really proper to faith. For through service, asceticism and worship the faithful consciousness realizes its unity with the divine. Here it enacts the very principle of pure insight: making "for itself" what was initially "in itself." Faith in God becomes in this way also the expression of subjective certainty. Therefore the self can deliver itself to God. In this sense, faith is at the same time a consciousness of one's own infinitude. However, in its criticism the Enlightenment unilaterally emphasizes this moment of unity, as later also Feuerbach will do, and presents the object of faith as something whose source lies only in the self. But, by this interpretation of the moment of trust proper to faith (faith as *credere Deo*, not only as *credere Deum*), faith is denatured. The unity characterizing trust is separated from its givenness. Faith knows that the activity of the self and the unity are only necessary, not sufficient conditions for its "object." The Enlightenment does not recognize this point. On the contrary, it reduces faith to an artificial fiction (*Erdichtung*). The moment of givenness is then also misunderstood as mere effect of the deceitful activity of the priests and thus as something that comes wholly from without. Yet notwithstanding this, the critique is effective. It leads to a destruction of the immediate unity that marks faith in its simplicity. The symbolization of the divine being in various signs, such as an image, a gesture, or a piece of bread, in light of this criticism of their being mere "fiction," become very problematic. The symbolic process cannot any longer fulfill its function. It becomes denatured and reduced to something wholly other, namely *superstition*. As already mentioned, faith itself is partly responsible for this reversal, because it is predominantly directed towards the absence of its object and cannot adequately conceive its immanence. The misunderstanding of the critique can only work through the misunderstanding that affects faith itself. Faith has the tendency to impoverish the unity of the divine and the human to an external prox-

imity of two spheres; to, as Hegel says, “an “on the one hand” and “on the other hand,” to an “also.”

All of this results in a reduction of the meaning of religious symbols to an improper blend of the divinity, conceived as pure being, with the impure actuality. Because of the criticism of the Enlightenment faith becomes anxious about forms of anthropomorphism. It flees from this danger by purifying God of all predicates (for every predicate has already an anthropomorphic, earthly connotation). In this way, God is reduced to an empty, indeterminate transcendence, an absolute being without predicates, unknown and unrecognizable, something that only can be an object of infinite longing. It now scarcely differs from the deism of the Enlightenment. As Hegel says, it becomes itself the Enlightenment, with the essential difference that it is an *unsatisfied Enlightenment*.⁴ Unsatisfied, because it becomes now a *nostalgia*, and so resembles the unhappy consciousness. Moreover, by this move faith prepares its own downfall. Once the unity of eternal truth and historical mediation (essential for the Christian religion) is broken and faith adopts the logic of understanding, it becomes susceptible to the critique which reduces the foundation of faith to controversial historical facts, divorced from their deeper religious meaning. It succumbs to the deficient interpretation the Enlightenment presents, and tries to prove its own truth with pure facts and sheer historical arguments. It thus enters into the logic of its opponent. With this adaptation it destroys the dialectic of finite and infinite, essential for religion, and it disappears.

3. Some Concluding Remarks

There is not much time left for further systematic reflections on the theme of the unsatisfied Enlightenment. But that is not a major problem since most of what is at stake is already more or less explicit, more or less suggest in my discussion of Hegel's ideas. I conclude then with a short indica-

⁴ Cf. PhG, 407; tr. 349.

tion of those points which, in my view, are of a special importance for a further reflection on the question of religion and its relation with thinking. For a further elaboration of most issues, I take the liberty to refer to my book *The Weight of Finitude*.

There is a lot to learn from Hegel's discussion on faith and pure insight and the text is of a peculiar relevance for some contemporary philosophical problems. The most important points are:

- the understanding (Verstand) is unsuitable to comprehend really the very essence of religion;
- the understanding cannot account for the specific meaning of religious symbols;
- modern and contemporary criticisms of religion frequently are based on an opposition between production and givenness, identity and alterity, oppositions which are not legitimated in themselves and often function as taken for granted;
- an extreme negative theology for which transcendence is no more than a sort of undetermined openness bears in itself the possible disappearance of all transcendence;
- a sheer supernaturalistic view on God has the tendency to turn over in its opposite, namely a sheer naturalism;
- there is a strange solidarity between a conception of the absolute as something merely beyond and the experience of actuality as essenceless, without any substantial weight;
- my last and important point is that the connection of all these things is not something merely historical, not merely the result of chance and coincidence, but is determined by an inescapable logic: where the human being thinks in this way about God and religion, the above oppositions must arise and block a fruitful thinking on God.

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RELIGION, MORALITY AND FORGIVENESS IN HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY

STEPHEN HOULGATE

1.

It is often believed that religion is nothing more than an instrument of moral education or, indeed, condemnation. In the popular imagination, especially among disaffected adolescents, religious belief is frequently reduced to a set of "Thou shalts" and "Thou shalt nots," most of which appear designed specifically to prevent us from finding any joy in life. Among philosophers, of course, the figure who has attacked the alleged moral core of religion most fervently is Nietzsche. In Nietzsche's view, religion – above all, Christianity – subordinates humanity to moral commands that urge us to repress all our instincts and desires. The moral judgements at the heart of Christianity are thus the expression of what Nietzsche sees as a resentful hostility towards life on the part of those who are too weak to succeed in it.¹

Kant, famously, has a rather less jaundiced view of morality than Nietzsche, and considers moral judgements to be an expression of rational freedom rather than resentment against life. Nevertheless, he agrees with Nietzsche in placing morality at the centre of religion. For Kant, "religion is (subjectively regarded) the recognition of all duties as divine commands." It is the activity through which we understand

¹ See, for example, Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke*, ed. K. Schlechta, 3 vols (München: Carl Hanser Verlag 1969) 2:1143: "die Geburt des Christentums aus dem Geiste des Ressentiment;" 3:837: "[die] *Vermoralisierung* [des Altertums] ist die Voraussetzung, unter der allein das Christentum über dasselbe Herr werden konnte."

the moral dictates of our own free reason to issue from the voice of God.²

In contrast to Kant and Nietzsche, however, there is another tradition that sees the Christian religion in particular as freeing us from, rather than subordinating us to, an overt sense of moral obligation. Luther, for example, protests strongly against those for whom the Gospels contain nothing more than “laws and moral commandments.”³ According to him, the true Christian is not the one who feels a strong personal obligation to carry out “works of virtue,” but the one who has *faith* in the love and grace of God.⁴ This is not, of course, to say that Christians are utterly indifferent to the dictates of morality. It is simply to say that a truly Christian life is not dominated by the feeling that we *should* do good, but is one in which we trust that the grace of God is at work within us enabling us actually to do good – “that Christ resides, lives and rules within you.”⁵ Good works do issue from faith, Luther insists, but they follow “freely without the compulsion of the law” from the spirit of love within the believer. The true believer is thus moved to do good by an inner “peace, joy and love,” rather than an explicit feeling of

² Immanuel Kant, *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (1784). *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, hrsg. von der preußischen, später deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften [hereafter quoted as *Akad.-Ausg.*] (Berlin: De Gruyter 1900sq.) Bd. 6, 153 [trans.: *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. Th. M. Greene and H.H. Hudson (New York: Harper Torchbooks 1960) 142. See also Allen W. Wood, “Rational theology, moral faith, and religion,” in: *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, ed. P. Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 1992) 403 and 406-7, and Sir Malcolm Knox, *The Layman's Quest* (London: George Allen and Unwin 1969) 99.

³ Martin Luther, *Kommentar zum Galaterbrief – 1519*, ed. W. Metzger, trans. I. Mann (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus 1984) 33.

⁴ *Ibidem*, 25.

⁵ *Ibidem*, 27. See also *Luthers Vorreden zur Bibel*, ed. H. Bornkamm (Frankfurt/M.: Insel Verlag 1983) 189-90: “Darum ist die Freiheit eine geistliche Freiheit, die nicht das Gesetz aufhebt, sondern darreicht, was vom Gesetz gefordert wird.”

moral obligation, and so acts "as if there were no law or punishment" (*als wäre kein Gesetz oder Strafe*)⁶.

Like Luther's, Hegel's religious position is – in Emil Fackenheim's word – "postmoral," because he, too, understands faith to be a condition in which we are freed *from* the mere obligation to do good and freed by grace *to* actual love itself.⁷ Yet this does not mean that Hegel sees no role at all for moral consciousness within the religious life. In Hegel's view, the postmoral Christian faith that we are the subjects of God's grace and forgiveness, whatever we do, itself presupposes that we first recognise moral obligations. In part, this is because only those who know that they should do well can feel forgiven for failing to do so. In the remainder of this essay I shall consider in more detail Hegel's account of the relation between postmoral Christian faith and moral consciousness.

2.

Hegel maintains that both Judaism and Christianity recognize the central importance of morality. This is apparent above all from his discussion of the Fall. For Hegel, the story of the Fall does not recount a unique, historical event that occurred at the dawn of creation. It is, rather, the "eternal myth of humanity" that discloses the movement all human beings make – or, at least, should make – from innocence to knowledge.⁸ Adam and Eve are mythical characters, who represent human beings in general and through whose action and suffering we learn about the loss of innocence that all of us must face.

⁶ Ibidem, 180 and 188. See also 172: "wo der Glaube ist, kann er sich nicht halten; er erweist sich, bricht heraus durch gute Werke."

⁷ See Emil Fackenheim, *The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1967) 148.

⁸ G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte*, erste Hälfte, ed. J. Hoffmeister, zweite Hälfte, ed. G. Lasson (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag 1968) 2:728.

In his 1821 manuscript on the philosophy of religion, before he turns to the story of the Fall itself, Hegel inserts some remarks on what he calls “the natural human being” (*der natürliche Mensch*)⁹. In the state of nature, he maintains, human beings are given over to desire, self-interest and fear, but can also frequently be mild-mannered. Such natural benevolence is, however, utterly contingent on natural conditions, and does not derive from insight into, and free commitment to, the good. It is thus a benevolence that falls short of true *human* goodness. Animals are what they are by nature and by virtue of their natural surroundings, but human beings have the capacity for knowledge and understanding and for free self-determination guided by such understanding. Indeed, only when they act on the basis of such enlightened freedom do they act in a distinctively human way. To act as they can and should, human beings must thus leave their purely natural state and become self-consciously rational, principled beings. This is not to say that natural desires and sympathies are to play no role at all in a fully human life – Hegel is adamant that we are not to eradicate natural desire¹⁰ – but that we must render our natural desires intelligent by incorporating them into a life of understanding and freedom. “Only through cognition (*Erkennen*) does human being exist,” Hegel says. Our actions should not merely be instinctive and natural, therefore, but should be conscious, free and responsible.¹¹

The idea that human beings are not born merely to exist in the state of nature is indicated in the Genesis story by the fact that Adam and Eve feel shame at their natural nakedness after they have eaten the forbidden fruit. To begin

⁹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, ed. W. Jaeschke, 3 vols (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag 1983-85) [hereafter *VPR*] 3:30-2 [trans.: Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. P.C. Hodgson, trans. R.F. Brown, P.C. Hodgson and J.M. Stewart (Berkeley: University of California Press 1984-87) [hereafter *LPR*] 3:93-5.] Further references will be given in the form: *VPR*, 3:30-2 = *LPR*, 3:93-5.

¹⁰ *VPR*, 1:260 = *LPR*, 1:359.

¹¹ *VPR*, 3:39, 32 = *LPR*, 3:103, 95.

with, the couple are not aware that there is anything wrong with nakedness. Once they have gained knowledge of good and evil, however, they immediately regard their natural condition as shameful or "evil" (*böse*), as something that must be hidden from God. In Hegel's view, the Genesis story, for all its naiveté, captures a fundamental truth about humanity.

The more precise way of representing this evil [condition] is to say that human beings become evil by cognizing, or, as the Bible represents it, that they have eaten of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. ... Natural humanity is not as it should be; this "should" (*dies Soll*) is the human concept, and that humanity does not conform to it first emerges in the separation, in the comparison with what humanity is in and for itself. It is cognition that first posits the antithesis in which evil is to be found.¹²

Hegel is well aware that the claim that we are evil "by nature" has led to misunderstanding and abuse throughout the centuries. In particular, it has given rise to the false notion – later condemned by Nietzsche – that the good life requires us to repress or even extirpate our natural desires. Nevertheless, Hegel believes that it is an important idea that reminds us that we are born to freedom and responsible action, not to mere natural innocence.

Consciousness has to enter into itself, it has to become concrete, become what [it] is in itself; hence it starts from immediacy, and through the sublation of this immediacy it elevates itself to thinking. This means that its true nature is to abandon its immediacy, to treat it as a state in which it ought not to be ... This has been expressed by saying that human beings are *evil by nature* (*böse von Natur*), i.e., they ought not to be the way they immediately are; hence they are as they ought not to be.¹³

It is important to recognize that the natural condition of human beings is to be regarded as evil only in so far as it falls

¹² VPR, 3:137-8 = LPR, 3:205-6.

¹³ VPR, 3:134 = LPR, 3:201-2. See also VPR, 3:135, 222, 228 = LPR, 3:202-3, 298, 304-5.

short of self-conscious, principled freedom. To be good, Hegel claims, is to act in the light of general principles which we know and understand.¹⁴ In the state of nature, by contrast, we act, without clear understanding, out of habit or instinct – instinct that is often, though not invariably, selfish. The state of nature is evil, therefore, because it prevents us from being the free, rational and good human beings that we are meant to be.

Note that human naturalness is not evil in the normal sense of the term. Hegel does not impute deliberate, self-conscious wickedness to human beings in the state of nature, be they children or primitive peoples. On the contrary, the state of nature is something of which we – together with Adam and Eve – are to be ashamed precisely because it *lacks* the capacity for deliberate action undertaken in the full understanding of what is rational and good. As Hegel notes in his 1824 lectures, if the word “evil” connotes the deliberate violation of what is known to be good, then “children are not evil, and this definition does not seem to fit many peoples and individuals. No. Children are innocent; and that is because they have no will and are not yet accountable (*noch keiner Zurechnung fähig sind*)”¹⁵. Hegel’s point, however – and the point he believes is made in the Genesis story of the Fall – is that once we become knowing beings, we recognize that the state of natural innocence is not right or good for us. In this sense, the state of nature may be deemed shameful or evil.

Nothing in Hegel’s thought, or in Genesis as he interprets it, sanctions the exploitation and oppression of children or eradication of primitive peoples. What does follow from Hegel’s position, however, is that all human beings in the state of nature are meant to fall from innocence into self-knowledge and freedom, whether through their own efforts or those of others. For Hegel, there is no right to remain innocent, natural and naked. There is, however, a right – and an obligation – to enter the world of knowledge and freedom,

¹⁴ Cf. VPR, 3:223 = LPR, 3:299.

¹⁵ VPR, 3:135 = LPR, 3:202.

a world that Genesis reveals to be also one of labour and pain. The writers of Genesis may have believed that Jehovah sought to avoid the Fall. In Hegel's view, by contrast, when we acquire a full understanding of God, we realise that God actually wants the Fall to occur all along, because he knows that only through it can we become truly human.

It is evident, however, that the Fall into knowledge of good and evil is not itself unequivocally good. The knowledge Adam and Eve gain makes them become "as gods" (Genesis 3: 5), but it also casts them into a new kind of evil that is distinct from that associated with being merely natural. This is the evil that resides in deliberately and knowingly refusing to do what is good. The deepest evil, for Hegel, does not lie in remaining in the state of nature, or in indulging one's natural impulses. It consists in consciously cutting oneself off from the good, from God and from other human beings, in being purely for oneself and shutting out all that is other than one's own freedom and power. "Abstractly," Hegel states, "being evil means singularizing myself in a way that cuts me off from the universal"¹⁶.

When they eat the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve thus the fall out of their shameful natural innocence into the much deeper evil or "sinfulness" of knowingly rejecting the good and God's will. They do not recognize their natural nakedness as shameful, however, until they realize that they have freely disobeyed God. That is to say, they come to regard both their nature *and* their free will as evil at one and the same time.¹⁷ This has to be the case, of course, because Adam and Eve can see themselves as evil in either sense, only in so far as they understand what it is to be good and know that they should conform to the good in their appearance and action. As Hegel puts it, evil is an "abstraction" that has no meaning apart from the good: "it is only in antithesis to the good"¹⁸. Adam and Eve's shame before God thus shows that they know not only that they are evil but also that they should be good.

¹⁶ VPR, 3:138 = LPR, 3:206.

¹⁷ Cf. VPR, 3:138 = LPR, 3:206.

¹⁸ VPR, 3:229 = LPR, 3:306.

In so far as they recognize that the good has a claim on them, Adam and Eve become *moral* beings.¹⁹ This does not mean that they immediately start to act in explicit accordance with the good; we do not know what they go on to do, except that they become farmers and produce children. It means simply that they recognize that they *should* only appear before God in a certain way, namely as clothed. For Hegel, one is not just a moral being when one actually behaves well or in a manner pleasing to God. One is a moral being the moment one has the sense that one should behave well. Adam and Eve evidently feel that they *should* not appear naked before God – that is why they hide from him – and so they are clearly moral beings.

In Hegel's view, to understand that one should behave or appear in a certain way is to understand that a claim is being made on one's freedom.²⁰ It is to understand not merely that something is being demanded of us, but also that we are free to meet that demand if we so choose. That is to say, moral beings recognize that they are responsible for what they do and for the way they appear, and so responsible for being – or not being – good. Hegel maintains that human beings should learn to accept responsibility for their own actions and regard them as produced by their own free will, because they are born to be free and rational. Animals always act out of instinct, but human beings are created "in the image of God" and so, from the outset, are implicitly (*an sich*) free, spiritual beings.²¹ The task imposed upon human beings by that implicit freedom is to become explicitly free and rational. They should thus learn to understand what they do as something they have freely initiated and thereby

¹⁹ For Hegel's full account of moral consciousness and will see G.W.F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, ed. E. Moldenhauer and K. Michel, *Theorie Werkausgabe*, vol 7 (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp Verlag 1970) [hereafter *GPR*] 203-91 (§§ 105-41) [trans.: Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 1991) [hereafter *PR*] 135-86]. Further references will be given in the form: *GPR*, 203-91 (§§ 105-41) = *PR*, 135-86.

²⁰ Cf. *VPR*, 3:39, 41 = *LPR*, 3:102, 104.

²¹ *VPR*, 3:134-5 = *LPR*, 3:202. See also *VPR*, 3:33, 36, 224 = *LPR*, 3:96, 99, 300.

accept that actions are imputable to them. In other words, human beings should become moral beings who *recognise* that there are things they are free to do and should do: "Humanity ought not to be innocent [...], it ought not to be brutish; in so far as human being is good, it ought not to be so in the sense that a natural thing is good – it ought to be *imputable* (*imputabel*). Responsibility means, in a general sense, the possibility of imputation"²².

On Hegel's interpretation, Adam and Eve's shame at their nakedness testifies to their recognition that they should be responsible, moral beings, rather than merely natural beings. At the same time, in recognizing that they should not just be natural beings, Adam and Eve actually become the moral beings they feel they ought to be: for they accept that they are responsible for their appearance before God and – albeit reluctantly – for disobeying God in the first place.

I should stress that I am not concerned here to evaluate the adequacy of Hegel's interpretation of the Fall. All I wish to point out is that, according to Hegel, both Judaism and Christianity understand the Fall to be the fall into *morality*, as well as into sin.²³ Indeed, it cannot be one without being the other. We cannot feel that we are sinful, unless we know that we should be good; and we cannot judge that we *should* be good, unless we realize that in many ways we fail to live up to the demands of goodness. In this sense, Judaeo-Christian religion considers being moral to be an essential part of our fallen, human state. Note that the moral consciousness sanctioned by religion, in Hegel's view, is not the self-righteous moral consciousness that deems all its actions to be virtuous.²⁴ It is a consciousness that is torn

²² VPR, 3:223 = LPR, 3:298. See Jeanette Bicknell, "The Individuality in the Deed: Hegel on Forgiveness and Reconciliation," in: *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain*, 37/38 (1998) 77.

²³ See Bernard M.G. Reardon, *Religion in the Age of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 1985) 70: "The biblical myth of the fall is the 'Mythus of Man' in that it symbolizes [...] the process by which he becomes man in assuming full human responsibility."

²⁴ On this self-righteous moral will, see Hegel, GPR, 272-86 (§ 140 and Addition); PR, 176-84.

asunder by an “infinite anguish,” because it feels that it should be good but knows all too well that it is not – the unhappy consciousness that, perhaps, finds its most poignant expression in the Psalms.²⁵

It is very important to remember that the Fall marks the emergence not only of evil and sin, but also of moral consciousness that knows it ought to shun evil. If we keep this clearly in mind, we will see that, even though (on Hegel’s view) God wants humanity to fall, evil is not now to be regarded, after the Fall, as desirable or inevitable. Evil is to be regarded as that which *should* and *can* be avoided. According to Hegel, therefore, evil is not absolutely necessary in our fallen world. What is necessary is simply the *possibility* of evil that is built into our very freedom to be good. As Hegel puts it in the philosophy of right, “it is ... in the nature of evil that man may will it, but need not necessarily do so.”²⁶ The problem with the religiously moral consciousness, however, is that, paradoxically, it feels unable to avoid the evil it knows it should and can shun.

A further essential element of the religiously moral consciousness, if not of the secular moral conscience, is the profound sense of falling short of what God wishes for us and so of being alienated from God.²⁷ Hegel points out, however, that the moral consciousness represented by Adam and Eve is actually not quite as alienated from God as it fears. When the serpent tempts Eve, it promises her that, if she and Adam eat the forbidden fruit, they “shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3: 5). Later in the story, after the Fall, God confirms that the serpent’s promise was not deceitful: “And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil” (Genesis 3: 22). Unlike some interpreters, Hegel takes God’s declaration in the Genesis story at face value and cites it as evidence that Adam and Eve do indeed come to share in God’s own un-

²⁵ Cf. VPR, 3:229 = LPR, 3:305.

²⁶ Hegel, GPR, 265 (§ 139 Addition); PR, 170. See also VPR, 3:259 = LPR, 3:336.

²⁷ Cf. VPR, 3:229 = LPR, 3:305.

derstanding through eating from the tree of knowledge.²⁸ Accordingly, he argues, Adam and Eve do not just fall into sin through becoming self-conscious, knowing beings; they also fall into, or ascend to, godliness. "It is in this principle of cognition (*Erkennen*)," he says, "that the principle of divinity is also posited"²⁹.

For Hegel, then, knowledge divides us from God by making us ashamed of our naturalness and conscious of our separate identity; but, at the same time, it unites us with God by allowing us to share God's own understanding of good and evil. In this way, Hegel writes in his manuscript, "knowledge heals the wound that it itself is"³⁰. The problem is that the moral consciousness does not know that it is one with God, but is conscious only of its fall from grace. Moral consciousness does not know, therefore, that it is healed by the very knowledge that wounds it, and so remains in infinite anguish.³¹ Hegel contends that the religiously moral consciousness eventually learns that it is one with God through the figure of Christ: for in Christ we see divinity incarnated in humanity itself. In the process, however, consciousness ceases being merely *moral* understanding of the difference between good and evil, and comes to be *faith* that knows the absolute nature of God himself.

For Hegel, Christianity recognizes, with Judaism, that we must shed our natural innocence and become moral beings. At the same time, however, Christian faith affirms that human beings are not born to remain merely fallen, moral beings, but must come to know, and indeed to share in, divinity itself. As Hegel puts it,

in the hearts and souls [of believers] is the firm [belief] that the issue is not a moral teaching (*eine moralische Lehre*), nor in general the thinking and willing of the subject within itself and from itself; rather what is of interest is an infinite relationship to God, to the present God, the certainty of the kingdom of God – finding satisfaction not in

²⁸ See VPR, 3:40-1, 139, 226 = LPR, 3:104, 207, 302.

²⁹ VPR, 3:139 = LPR, 3:207.

³⁰ VPR, 3:42, 40 = LPR, 3:106, 103.

³¹ See Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte*, 2:729.

morality, ethics, or conscience, but rather in that than which nothing is higher, the relationship to God himself.³²

3

At the conclusion of the story of the Fall, Adam and Eve do not realize that they have come to share in God's understanding, but fear that they have cut themselves off from God. In Christian faith, Hegel suggests, religious consciousness finally recognizes that humanity is after all capable of participating in and manifesting divinity, for such faith understands Christ himself to be God incarnate. At the same time, however, the character of that divinity is understood in a new way. Divinity is now believed to consist not just in knowledge of good and evil and the exercise of wise, and often merciful, judgement, but in *love* that is prepared to give itself – to sacrifice itself – for another.³³

The supreme manifestation of Christ's divine, self-giving love, Hegel maintains, is his *death*: "death is love itself; in it absolute love is envisaged"³⁴. Love, for Hegel, means finding one's true self in union with another. In love, therefore, we give up the idea that we are a separate person with an identity all of our own and acquire a new identity in and through our union with the other. As Hegel writes in his manuscript, "love [consists] in giving up one's personality (*im Aufgeben seiner Persönlichkeit*), all that is one's own, etc. [It is] a self-conscious activity, the supreme surrender [of oneself] in the other"³⁵. The willingness to die for others, we are told, is the highest expression of such self-giving love; it is the ultimate "surrender of oneself in the other." It is above all in being

³² VPR, 3:245 = LPR, 3:322. See also Hegel, VPR, 3:47 = LPR, 3:110, and Bicknell, "The Individuality in the Deed," cf. note 22, 79. For a more extensive account of Hegel's interpretation of Christianity, see S. Houlgate, *Freedom, Truth and History. An Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy* (London: Routledge 1991) 176-232.

³³ VPR, 3:245-6 = LPR, 3:322.

³⁴ VPR, 3:150 = LPR, 3:220.

³⁵ VPR, 3:60 = LPR, 3:125.

prepared to die, therefore, that Christ demonstrates his absolute love and so proves his divinity.³⁶

Yet Christ's death is, of course, also the ultimate proof of his irreducible finitude and humanity. The "pinnacle of finitude," Hegel writes, "is not actual life in its temporal course, but rather death, the anguish of death"³⁷. Christ's death is thus the point at which he manifests both his humanity *and* his divinity at one and the same time. Indeed, it is the point at which he reveals that divinity consists not in superhuman majesty and power, but in living a finite human life of love. In Christ, therefore, we see that human "frailty" (*Gebrechlichkeit*) does not cut us off from God, as Adam and Eve feared, but is precisely what enables us to manifest divine love most fully.³⁸ If we could not die, we could not know that we are capable of absolute, unconditional, self-giving love. For, as St John writes, "greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15: 13).

Hegel notes that Christ's death is sometimes presented – by both Christians and non-Christians – as a sacrificial death inflicted upon him in order to atone for the sins of humanity. On this view, Christ is, as it were, God's whipping boy, who is punished on our behalf to release us from the pain of being punished ourselves. Accordingly, God is viewed "as a tyrant who demands sacrifice," and who lets his own son be punished in our place so that we can enjoy eternal life.³⁹ Unlike Nietzsche, however, Hegel believes that this interpretation severely distorts the Christian position. Christ's death, for Hegel, is indeed a sacrificial death or "*Opfertod*," Christ does die for the benefit of others.⁴⁰ He is

³⁶ A similar point is made, from a non-Hegelian perspective, by the theologian Keith Ward, *The Christian Way* (London: SPCK 1976) 51: "Jesus' love was shown at its highest on the cross; and this shows the real cost of love. To love, we really have to give, to share." In this respect – as, I believe, in most others – Hegel's understanding of Christianity is quite orthodox.

³⁷ VPR, 3:60 = LPR, 3:124-5.

³⁸ See VPR, 3:235, 239, 249 = LPR, 3:311, 315, 326.

³⁹ VPR, 3:151 = LPR, 3:220.

⁴⁰ VPR, 3:61, 150 = LPR, 3:126, 219.

sacrificed, however, not as an act of divine punishment, but in order to reveal to us that death need not be meaningless but can be the supreme expression of divine love. Christ's death does not remove the threat of death from us; like Heidegger, Hegel points out that each of us has to die "for oneself" (*für sich selbst*)⁴¹. What Christ's death achieves is the reevaluation of the death that each of us must face: it gives new value and meaning to death by showing that it need not just be the end of life but can be the fulfilment of a life of love. We find satisfaction in Christ's death, therefore, not because we are let off the hook, but because we see in that death what it really means to be divine, and because we realize that we ourselves are capable, in our very frailty, of divinity. "The assertion is justified," Hegel writes, "that Christ [was] given *for us*, [and that his death] may be represented as a sacrificial death, as the act of absolute satisfaction." His death satisfies us, however, "because it presents the absolute history of the divine idea" and shows us what it is to be *humanly* divine.⁴²

None of this is to say that love actively seeks death. Hegel dismisses as sentimental those who think that love requires them "to drown themselves together"⁴³. Love consists in living for others and giving ourselves for others in the way we live. Yet love also expresses itself in the *willingness* to die for another; indeed, that is its highest expression. Death can, therefore, be a divinely loving relinquishing of oneself, and need not be merely the tortured, agonizing loss of oneself. This what is revealed in Christ's death, according to Hegel. Contemplating Christ's death is thus not a morbid exercise in rubbing our faces in our own mortality. It releases within

⁴¹ VPR, 3:63 = LPR, 3:128; translation emended; the Hodgson translation reads: "everyone dies on his own." See also Andrew Shanks, *Hegel's Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 1991) 40: "[Hegel's] thinking represents, in effect, a radical insistence on the principle of the intrinsic 'irreplaceability of the individual'; there can therefore be no question here of Christ appearing as a 'substitute', miraculously interposed between us and the otherwise implacable wrath of God."

⁴² VPR, 3:61-2 = LPR, 3:126-7.

⁴³ VPR, 3:71 = LPR, 3:135-6.

us the realization that, in our very mortality, we can be divinely loving beings. In this sense, Christ takes the sting out of death, or, as Hegel phrases it, "puts death to death"⁴⁴. Christ does not prevent us from dying, but he makes us realize that as sinful, mortal creatures we are nevertheless able to participate fully in divinity.⁴⁵

Christ's own "resurrection," in turn, does not entail his cheating death and being physically revived. It consists in his coming alive for his followers, through his irreversible death, as divine love. Indeed, it consists in Christ's coming alive *within* those who trust and believe in him as the spirit of love that suffuses them. For Hegel, Christ's resurrection actually occurs at Pentecost (and in every subsequent act of Holy Communion).⁴⁶ Faith, then, is not just the conviction that Christ is God incarnate. It is also the conviction that Christ is resurrected within us as Holy Spirit. Indeed, faith takes *itself* to be the work of Holy Spirit.⁴⁷ Faith is thus not merely the moral belief that we *should* behave in a certain way. It is the knowledge of God that knows itself to be the very spirit and love of God itself. Faith, in other words, is the condition in which we actually become the caring, com-

⁴⁴ VPR, 3:67, 247 = LPR, 3:131, 324.

⁴⁵ Elsewhere, I have argued that the Christ-like readiness to *let go* of our cherished conception of the fundamental categories of thought is the key to Hegel's own logical method. See Houlgate, *Freedom, Truth and History*, cf. note 32, 65.

⁴⁶ VPR, 3:76, 166, 247 = LPR, 3:140, 236, 324. See also Peter C. Hodgson, "Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel," in: *Nineteenth Century Religious Thought in the West*, ed. N. Smart, J. Clayton, S. Katz and P. Sherry, 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 1985) 1:106: "the resurrection-event constitutes a transition from the sensible presence of God in a single individual to the spiritual presence of God in the community of faith;" and Henry S. Harris, *Hegel's Ladder*, 2 vols (Indianapolis: Hackett 1997) 2:692: "The Savior is resurrected in his community here and now. It is not a historic event of far away and long ago." For my review of Harris' extraordinary book, see S. Houlgate, "Absolute Forgiveness," in: *Radical Philosophy*, 96 (July/August 1999) 44-6.

⁴⁷ VPR, 3:85, 255-6, 260 = LPR, 3:150, 333, 337. In this respect Hegel is an orthodox Lutheran. See *Luthers Vorreden zur Bibel*, cf. note 5, 182: "Glaube ist ein göttlich Werk in uns, das uns wandelt und neu gebiert aus Gott."

passionate beings that the merely moral conscience thinks we *ought* to be. This is not say that all who merely profess faith are automatically filled with love for their fellows. It is to say, rather, that the true test of a person's faith and trust in Christ is the degree to which he or she actually is good and loving, and not the degree to which he or she merely feels obligated to do the good.

Genuine faith, for Hegel, brings with it a sense of being reborn – of being freed from the burdensome obligation to love and freed to actual love itself. At the same time, it is a sense of being reborn through the presence within us of *divine* love, that is, through the grace of God. Faith thus knows that it is not a human achievement but “faith brought about by God.” It is the condition in which we enjoy God's presence within us and consequently partake of the “enjoyment of being reconciled” with God.⁴⁸

Hegel is aware, however, that the idea of divine grace can easily give rise to an apparent antinomy between human freedom and dependence upon God. The “moral view,” he writes, “is that of free will as subjective.” The opposed view, which he finds in Calvinism, is that human activity is not free after all but depends on the “purely external” grace of God.⁴⁹ Hegel's own view is that divine grace works in and through human freedom itself. Human beings are not passive when in receipt of grace, but “participate in it essentially with their subjective freedom, and in their knowing, willing and believing, the moment of subjective freedom is expressly required”⁵⁰.

This human activity takes two forms. First of all, as Hegel makes clear in the philosophy of history, we are active in *letting* the Holy Spirit work within us. The subjective spirit of the believer must take up the Holy Spirit within itself and “let it abide within us” (*den Geist ... in sich wohnen lassen*).⁵¹ Believers do this, Hegel maintains, by opening their hearts and minds to Christ's love in Holy Communion. Note

⁴⁸ VPR, 3:85, 165, 262 = LPR, 3:150, 235, 339.

⁴⁹ VPR, 3:92-3 = LPR, 3:157.

⁵⁰ VPR, 1:344 = LPR, 1:456.

⁵¹ Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte*, 2:880.

that the activity demanded of us, in Hegel's view, is not practical activity. As a Lutheran, he does not believe that we earn divine grace by performing good works. The only "work" we need to carry out is the work of opening ourselves to, and receiving, divine grace and love itself. We have to concentrate our minds on the true nature of God revealed in Christ, and ensure that "this truth should become ever more identical with the self, with the human will, and that this truth should become one's volition, one's object, one's spirit"⁵². Hegel believes that one can let the truth into one's mind through art and philosophy. Only in religious faith, however, is the truth felt so inwardly and profoundly that it actually transforms us into loving beings.

Second, we must not only let divine love into our hearts, but also be active in so far as divine love actually operates within us. For Hegel, indeed, divine love can only work *through* our own activity. It is not a separate, autonomous power of its own. If we are not active in caring for others, there can be no actual divine love at work in the world. In Hegel's view, God's activity in the world is simply *human* activity that has been infused with and transformed by divine love. There is no conflict, therefore, between human freedom and divine grace. Indeed, for Hegel, "in virtue of grace the human being is the *same activity* [as God]"⁵³. This is not merely how philosophy interprets divine grace. Hegel believes that it is also how true Christian faith itself understands grace, above all in Holy Communion.⁵⁴

Humanity and divinity are thus known by faith to be identical not only in Christ, but also in those who believe in him. In faith, Hegel explains, "Holy Spirit is nothing external to the subject – it is its own spirit, whereon it believes"⁵⁵. That is to say, Holy Spirit is our own spirit that has itself become "the true and proper spirit, the Holy Spirit," by letting go of its own will and letting itself be informed by

⁵² VPR, 3:260 = LPR, 3:337.

⁵³ VPR, 1:249 = LPR, 3:349, my [S.H.] emphasis

⁵⁴ VPR, 1:88-9, 333 = LPR, 1:180, 445.

⁵⁵ VPR, 3:288 = LPR, 3:372.

Christ's divine love.⁵⁶ We are loving beings in our *own* activity, therefore, precisely because we give ourselves over to a love that we recognize *not* just to be our own.⁵⁷

At this point we must recall that, for Hegel, religion does not provide a clear conceptual understanding of the truth, but is the mode of consciousness in which we *feel* and *picture* the truth about the world and ourselves.⁵⁸ For philosophy, "God" is actually absolute *reason* – the universal, dialectical rationality that informs and structures nature and human life, and that does so all the more explicitly, the more we understand it and let it hold sway over, and become the governing spirit in, our lives.⁵⁹ In contrast to philosophy, religion comprehends such absolute reason through images and metaphors. It talks of God "creating" the world or "begetting" his only Son. Talk of the free "grace" of God is also pictorial or metaphorical, since God is not actually a self-conscious being capable of exercising grace – or, indeed, moral judgement – as we normally understand it. Hegel claims that religious faith is well aware that such terms as "begetting" and "grace" are metaphors and should not be taken literally. In his view, therefore, it is not just philosophy, but also religion itself, that eschews literalism:

⁵⁶ VPR, 3:187 = LPR, 3:261. See also VPR, 3:260 = LPR, 3:337: "the Holy Spirit is equally the subject's spirit to the extent that the subject has faith." According to Cyril O'Regan, in claiming that God and humanity become one in faith, Hegel departs from Luther's position and comes close to that of Meister Eckhard; see *The Heterodox Hegel* (Albany: SUNY Press 1994) 219-20, 245, 254, 260. Walter Jaeschke maintains that Hegel's identification of the human and the divine in faith is more likely to have been prompted by his early study of Spinoza; see *Die Vernunft in der Religion* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: frommann-holzboog 1986) 344. For my review of the English edition of Jaeschke's book, see *The Owl of Minerva*, 23 (1992) 183-88.

⁵⁷ See also Robert Gascoigne, *Religion, Rationality and Community. Sacred and Secular in the Thought of Hegel and his Critics* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff 1985) 44: "The subject becomes himself spirit, member of the Kingdom of God, only if he allows the process of divine life to be realized in himself."

⁵⁸ GPR, 418 § 270) = PR, 293.

⁵⁹ VPR, 1:79 = LPR, 1:170.

if we say that God has begotten a son, we know quite well that this is only an image; representation provides us with "son" and "begetter" from a familiar relationship, which, as we well know, is not meant in its immediacy, but is supposed to signify a different relationship, which is something like this one.⁶⁰

Hegel insists, however, that such metaphors and images should not be dismissed by the philosopher as mere distortions of the truth. They are appropriate – and, indeed, necessary – ways of *picturing* the truth.⁶¹ Of all the images that religion employs, the one that is most appropriate, according to Hegel, is that of God as "love."⁶² It is right to picture God or absolute reason as love, because, like love, dialectical reason reconciles opposites in the world.⁶³ Furthermore, reason literally takes the form of love in human beings: to love is to be *rational* in one's feelings. Accordingly, Hegel remarks, "when we say, 'God is love', we are saying something very great and true"⁶⁴. Hegel also believes that, through its pictorial representations, Christianity gets the relation between love and *moral* consciousness absolutely right.

Moral consciousness, for Hegel, is defined by, among other things, the following three qualities. (1) It is concerned, not just with the rights and entitlements of people, but with their personal well-being and happiness. (2) It regards itself as obligated to further the happiness of others. (3) It believes that this obligation falls on each one of us personally and requires that each of us hold himself or herself responsible for the welfare of others.⁶⁵ The moral consciousness thus believes that it has a responsibility to fur-

⁶⁰ VPR, 1:293 = LPR, 1:398.

⁶¹ VPR, 3:269 = LPR, 3:346.

⁶² VPR, 3:17, 126, 245-6 = LPR, 3:78, 193, 322.

⁶³ See G.W.F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, ed. E. Moldenhauer and K. Michel, 2 vols *Theorie Werkausgabe*, vols 5 and 6 (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp Verlag 1969) 6:277, where reason or the *Begriff* is described as "freie Liebe."

⁶⁴ VPR, 3:201 = LPR, 3:276.

⁶⁵ GPR, 236, 250-1 (§§ 125, 133-4) = PR, 153, 161.

ther the ends of others, and its own ends, through its *own* efforts. As Hegel puts it,

[the moral portrayal] posits an absolute purpose; [it posits] the essence of spirit in a purpose that takes the form of volition, and indeed a volition that is only my will, so that this subjective side is the principal matter. Law, universality, rationality are in me as *my* rationality; and likewise the volition and actualization that make these things my own, make them into subjective purposes, are also *mine*.⁶⁶

Moral consciousness is somewhat like Hercules who “swings himself up into heaven through his bravery and his deeds”⁶⁷.

Religious faith, by contrast, recognizes that one cannot be a truly loving person through one’s own moral efforts alone: “the subject does not attain reconciliation on its own account, i.e., [...] in virtue of its [own] activity or conduct”⁶⁸. This is because love entails letting go of one’s own will and finding one’s identity with others. Love is thus only love where it lets others share in its work. In married love we work together with one other person; in religious love we work together with the whole community of faith. The crucial thing in each case, however, is that we are active in loving others but at the same time recognize that we are not responsible by ourselves for the love that we show. It is I who love, but I do not love through my *own* efforts alone. My love is thus never just my own; it is not my own to initiate, my own to sustain, or my own to control. It can never, therefore, be my own responsibility alone to love others. Love is something that arises in me, when I stop trying to make it happen, and simply *let* it arise where it will. Indeed, opening oneself up to love and being prepared to let it occur, is the first step in beginning to love, for it is to renounce the primacy of my own will on which the moral, responsible will still insists. “In love,” Hegel writes, “I am also preserved, but

⁶⁶ VPR, 3:91-2 = LPR, 3:156, my [S.H.] emphasis

⁶⁷ VPR, 3:236 = LPR, 3:315.

⁶⁸ VPR, 3:234 = LPR, 3:310. See Bicknell, “The Individuality in the Deed,” cf. note 22, 79.

in a wholly different way, namely, by surrendering ... my positing (*Setzen*)”⁶⁹.

Christian faith gives expression to this insight by claiming that my love is not my own achievement, but is actually the spirit of Christ and the grace of God within me.⁷⁰ In this way, faith acknowledges that I cannot make myself love others, just because I feel I should; indeed, in so far as I concentrate on my own responsibility towards others, I very often lose sight of *their* particular needs and welfare. I must open myself to the divine love embodied in Christ and let it work within me, as it were, of its own accord. When I do this, it should be noted, I cease being a *moral* consciousness that affirms its personal responsibility and obligation to do good, and become a *postmoral* consciousness that lets itself be taken over by Christ's love. Yet, if my faith is genuine I become the moral consciousness that is in fact lovingly concerned for others.⁷¹

Religious faith thus makes us truly and effectively moral by suspending our moral efforts to be good on our own. One might say, indeed, that the message of Christianity is this: if at first you don't succeed by yourself, *let go*, and then you will begin to love. This is not to say that religious believers should abandon all sense of moral responsibility whatsoever and give up any idea that they are to become good, caring and loving. Religious belief knows that we have an absolute duty to love. It also knows, however, that we cannot fulfil our duty to love through our own efforts alone, because genuine love is not *ours* to summon up. Faith is, indeed, the belief that the way to fulfil our responsibility properly is to open ourselves to the divine love embodied in Christ and to let that love inform and transform us (just as in philosophy we let reason hold sway in our thought). Genuine faith tries to be good, therefore, not by endeavouring to observe certain

⁶⁹ VPR, 3:92 =; LPR, 3:156.

⁷⁰ VPR, 3:165-6 = LPR, 3:235-6.

⁷¹ Christ does not just feel obliged to love and so, in that sense, is not a moral being. Yet Christ's love actually fulfils the demand of morality that we further the welfare of others and so, in this sense, can be called a *moral* love (VPR, 3:53 = LPR, 3:118).

practical rules of behaviour through one's own efforts, but rather by seeking to *know and be taken over by God's love*. It recognizes that "excellence of character, morality, etc. are all not the ultimate need of the spirit, which is that humanity acquire the speculative concept of spirit."⁷² Such faith, Hegel believes, releases us from the obligation to be good and actually fills us with love itself.⁷³

Secular ethical consciousness recognizes that moral goodness depends upon life in the institutions of the rational state – institutions in which I am active, but which I do not create by myself. Philosophy recognizes that we owe who we are to the work of reason in nature and history, and that we become self-consciously rational when we let such reason explicitly inform our thought. Religion is our *felt* understanding of the truth that philosophy comprehends. It pictures God or absolute reason as love, and it sees the love embodied in Christ as the manifestation of the "divine." Religion is right to do so, Hegel maintains, because love is, indeed, the form that reason takes in feeling. To be sure, God or absolute reason is not literally love before there are any human beings; but such reason has the same dialectical structure as, and so is just *like*, love. Furthermore, God or reason takes the form of real love *in* human beings.⁷⁴ Faith is thus right to believe that in Christ's love God himself – the Absolute – becomes incarnate. Religion also recognises rightly that love can never be our moral achievement alone, but is something we can only *let* into our hearts. It expresses that recognition by saying that the love within us is there by the "grace" of God.

⁷² Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte*, 2:737.

⁷³ See also *Luthers Vorreden zur Bibel*, cf. note 5, 190: "Auf diese Weise hat uns Christus vom Gesetz frei gemacht. Darum ist's nicht eine wilde fleischliche Freiheit, die nichts tun solle, sondern die viel und allerlei tut und *von des Gesetzes Fordern und Schuld ledig ist*" (my [S.H.] emphasis).

⁷⁴ *VPR*, 1:342 = *LPR*, 1:455: "The love that God is exists within actuality as conjugal love."

4.

Faith is not only the consciousness of being filled with the spirit of holiness and love, it is also the consciousness of being *forgiven* – the conviction that one does not live under relentless moral judgement and condemnation. Religiously moral consciousness, as we have seen, feels personally obligated to do good, but also fears that it constantly fails to meet its obligations in some way. As a result, Hegel says, such consciousness feels ashamed and condemned in its own eyes: “I know myself always as what ought not to be”⁷⁵.

Religious faith, by contrast, recognizes that the moral judgement passed on us is never the last word, but that ultimately we are forgiven all that we do. This is not to say that faith frees us from the risk of legal punishment when we have done wrong. Hegel rejects the idea that the pious are subject to no earthly law; in his view, we will always be subject to civic and legal sanction if we break the law.⁷⁶ What faith does, however, is free us from the sense that we are morally unredeemable – that we are bad people who can never be brought to do good. Faith affords us this liberation from final moral judgement by assuring us of ultimate forgiveness.

What does it mean for the believer to understand himself or herself to be forgiven? For Hegel, it means quite simply that one regards the evil action one has committed as *not* having been committed after all. Forgiveness renders what has been done undone (*das Geschehene ungeschehen*).⁷⁷ This expression is, however, open to serious misunderstanding. Hegel insists that it does not mean that the action is forgotten. Objectively, the action has occurred, had definite effects and cannot be taken back retrospectively. Forgive-

⁷⁵ VPR, 3:230 = LPR, 3:307.

⁷⁶ GPR, 418, 425 (§ 270) = PR, 293, 299. According to Hegel, the only person who can pardon people and exempt them from legal punishment, when they have broken the law, is the monarch; see GPR, 454-5 (§ 282 and Addition); PR, 325-6. The church cannot issue such pardons.

⁷⁷ VPR, 3:56, 259-60, 287 = LPR, 3:121, 337, 371.

ness means, however, that the action will not be counted against me as evidence that that my will and character are fundamentally evil. Yes, I am the one who did the awful deed; that is not to be forgotten. But, for the purposes of evaluating my character, the action is disregarded. It is deemed not to have been carried out, and is not imputed to me.⁷⁸ In this way, I am given a new start – the opportunity to show that I am not evil after all, but capable of good.

Hegel states at several points in his lectures that forgiveness renders undone what has been done. It is important to remember, however, that this does not mean erasing the act from our personal or collective memory. It means discounting the act *when considering a person's character*. One who forgives another does not allow the other to be defined and condemned by his or her sinful acts, but regards the other as always *free* to be good, whatever the other has done. Indeed, for Hegel, believing oneself to be forgiven is nothing but believing oneself to be free from being defined by one's evil acts. In the sphere of "finitude" or ordinary life people are judged according to their deeds. "If they have done evil, then they *are* evil," Hegel claims; "evil is in them as their quality." In the sphere of religion, however, "spirit can undo what has been done." Religious faith is the belief that we can be freed from the evil we have displayed in the past and start again. "The action certainly remains in the memory," Hegel states, "but spirit strips it away. Imputation, therefore, does not attain to this sphere"⁷⁹.

To forgive is thus to refrain from formulating a definitive moral judgement on someone's character based on what they have done. It is to accord to others the freedom to be

⁷⁸ Here, once again, Hegel is close to Luther; see *Luthers Vorreden zur Bibel*, cf. note 5, 182: "Aber weil wir an Christum glauben und des Geistes Anfang haben, ist uns Gott so günstig und gnädig, daß er solche Sünde nicht achten noch richten will."

⁷⁹ *VPR*, 3:248 = *LPR*, 3:324-5. In contrast to Jeanette Bicknell, I do not believe that through forgiveness (as interpreted by Hegel) "individuality in the deed vanishes," but rather that individuals are saved from simply being *reduced* to their deeds; see Bicknell, "The individuality in the Deed," cf. note 22, 80.

good, whatever they have done in the past. It is to believe that "spirit has the energy to modify itself inwardly, to erase all that has happened, and to destroy inwardly the maxims of its will")⁸⁰. The act of forgiving another is thus an act of faith in another's freedom to be good; and understanding oneself to be forgiven is having faith in one's own freedom to be good. Forgiveness is the *postmoral* act of letting people be more than morality would judge them to be.⁸¹

Yet, for Hegel, faith is not just the belief that all human beings are free in themselves to be good, it is also the belief that we are forgiven by God. At first sight, however, it is not at all clear what Hegel can mean by saying this. As we know, Hegel understands God to be absolute reason, not to be an infinite, self-conscious personality *who* exercises reason, and it is evident that reason cannot grant forgiveness as we normally understand it. Only human beings filled with divine love can actually forgive one another; indeed, they are, for Hegel, the effective agents of divine forgiveness. Nevertheless, it still makes sense, in Hegel's view, to say

⁸⁰ VPR, 1:260 = LPR, 1:360. See Shanks, *Hegel's Political Theology*, cf. note 41, 40.

⁸¹ William Desmond suggests that Hegel explains away or "rationalizes" evil by interpreting it as a necessary moment in the development of dialectical reason in history; see Desmond, "Evil and Dialectic" in: *New Perspectives on Hegel's Philosophy of Religion*, ed. David Kolb (Albany: SUNNY Press 1992) 165. Desmond counters this "Hegelian" interpretation of evil by arguing (in Kiekegaardian fashion) that evil is in fact always my singular responsibility and not merely the consequence of some universal, rational process (172). On my reading, however, Hegel's point is not to diminish my responsibility for my evil acts: even if I owe who I am to society, history and reason, I am still the one who must bear responsibility for my actions. Hegel's principal point is that responsible individuals are always *free* to be good, whatever evil they may have committed. This consciousness of freedom is what Hegel understands by a sense of being "forgiven." Desmond's own view of forgiveness comes close to the one I am attributing to Hegel. "One owns up in singular absolute responsibility," he writes, "not only in order to accept the deed as mine, but to ask for *release* from its evil, to be absolved, to be forgiven" (173, my [S.H.] emphasis). As far as I can tell, however, Desmond does not acknowledge that Hegel actually shares a similar view of forgiveness.

that we are forgiven by God himself: for, in saying this, we give expression to our belief that we can never be cut off from God or prevented from sharing in divine love by what we have done. To believe that we are forgiven by God is thus to believe that we are never forsaken by the love that is God. It is to believe that, however evil we have been, we are never to be denied the possibility of receiving and exhibiting within ourselves the Holy Spirit of love. Since it is the figure of Christ who reveals to us that human beings are always capable of divine love, the believer can say, with Luther, that we are forgiven by God specifically “through Christ” (*durch Christus*).⁸²

In the 1827 and 1831 lectures on the philosophy of religion, Hegel states that, in so far as we believe ourselves to be forgiven, we trust that our evil actions are not to be imputed to us as evidence of fundamental evil in our character. We believe ourselves always to be free to be good. Yet Hegel also states that moral consciousness is already the awareness that we are free; it is only because the moral consciousness knows itself to be free that it accepts that actions can be imputed to it.⁸³ What this suggests is that our *moral* consciousness of freedom and responsibility is actually a prior condition of our *postmoral* consciousness of being forgiven and being free to love.

On the surface, this seems to be highly paradoxical. Can we really say that evil is *not* to be definitively imputed to us, only because evil actions *are* imputable to us? Does this make sense? Yes, because I can know myself to be free from whatever evil I do and free to let love into my heart only to the extent that I know myself to be *free* to do evil in the first place. Religious faith, for Hegel, is a postmoral condition: it is the belief that we are not forsaken by God but are always free to let ourselves be suffused with a divine love for which we are not alone responsible. What Hegel shows, however, is that we can only know ourselves to be free to receive love in this way, if we first know ourselves to be free, responsible,

⁸² *Luthers Vorreden zur Bibel*, cf. note 5, 52.

⁸³ *VPR*, 3:248, 287 = *LPR*, 3:324-5, 371.

moral beings. In this sense, our moral consciousness is itself the presupposition of our postmoral religious faith. It should now be clear, therefore, that moral consciousness, in Hegel's view, is central to genuine religious faith. We must first fall with Adam and Eve into consciousness of our sinful and moral freedom, if we are ever to discover within ourselves the freedom to become postmoral beings by letting ourselves and one another share in divine love.

Moral consciousness is also presupposed by religious faith in another sense, for one can only consider oneself to be *forgiven*, if one first recognizes that one has indeed done wrong through one's freedom. To accept forgiveness – whether literal or metaphorical – is to accept that one has sinned, but that one's sins will not be held forever against one. If there is no moral sense that we are responsible for going wrong, then there can be no acceptance that our own wrongdoing has been discounted or forgiven us.

Our moral consciousness finds expression, Hegel claims, in our desire to *repent*. Repentance (*Reue*) is, however, not merely the inward condemnation of what we have done; it is not merely the moral consciousness that we were wrong and should do better. It is also the desire to be brought back to the ways of love by God. In repentance, therefore, we do not focus purely on our own guilt and our own responsibility for self-improvement. We turn to God and offer up our hearts to be filled with divine love.⁸⁴ As the theologian, Keith Ward, puts it, "the penitent man is one who says, 'By the standard of love I fail; I can only rely wholly on God, that he may accept me and bring me to a fulfilment I cannot achieve alone.'"⁸⁵

Religiously moral consciousness is conscious of its responsibility to be good and of its failure to meet its responsibilities. Faith is the postmoral consciousness of being forgiven and of being free to love, despite one's past failures. In Hegel's view, one can feel forgiven only if one accepts that one has actually done wrong. Furthermore, as we have seen,

⁸⁴ VPR, 1:334 and 3:259 = LPR, 1:446 and 3:336-7.

⁸⁵ Ward, *The Christian Way*, cf. note 36, 38.

one can have faith that one is free to love only if one first accepts that one is morally free and responsible. Moral consciousness of one's wrongdoing *and* of one's freedom is thus a precondition of the postmoral feeling of being forgiven and of being free to love. Repentance, for Hegel, is the double act whereby one accepts one's moral responsibility for one's evil deeds and at the same time seeks, postmorally, to let love into one's heart.

Such repentance, Hegel remarks, is the precondition of feeling reconciled with God and being filled with divine love.⁸⁶ Indeed, it is the only precondition thereof. Like Luther, Hegel believes that we do not have to earn divine grace by carrying out morally praiseworthy actions or "works." All we have to do is accept moral responsibility for the wrong that we do and recognize that we are nevertheless capable of divine love. In other words, the only precondition of our being and feeling forgiven by God is that we *accept* that we can be forgiven – that we can share in, and manifest, God's love after all, even though we have committed evil acts. There is, in Hegel's view, only one unforgivable sin, and that is to reject the idea that we can ever be forgiven, to reject the idea that we can be filled with the Holy Spirit of love. This is the so-called sin against the Holy Spirit.⁸⁷ This sin has been deemed mysterious by some, but for Hegel it consists simply in the "denial of the spirit itself" (*das Leugnen des Geistes selbst*)⁸⁸ – the denial that we can ever become Holy Spirit, and the accompanying insistence that we are irrevocably condemned by our evil actions.

In Hegel's view, Christianity is thus the religion of radical forgiveness.⁸⁹ There is nothing one can do, however heinous, that can prevent one from being free to love, except refusing to believe that one is indeed capable of loving. This is obviously hard for many people to accept. Why should murderers or child abusers be forgiven? The Christian answer, endorsed by Hegel, is that "before God all human beings are

⁸⁶ VPR, 3:288 = LPR, 3:372.

⁸⁷ See Matthew 12:31, Mark 3:29, and Luke 12:10.

⁸⁸ VPR, 3:165, 77 = LPR, 3:235, 141.

⁸⁹ See Harris, *Hegel's Ladder*, cf. note 46, 2:115, 521-2.

equal" and so are equally free to share in God's love.⁹⁰ Nothing one can do can cut one off from the possibility of being love incarnate.

Note that the Christian doctrine of universal forgiveness lends no encouragement to those who wish to continue committing evil with impunity. This is because one can only believe oneself to be forgiven, if one recognizes the obligation to be good, feels genuine repentance for one's evil actions, and accepts that one is free to *love*. There can be no feeling of being forgiven, therefore, where one gloats that one has been given another chance to do evil. One only feels forgiven in the Christian sense, when one feels one has been given another chance to do good. The doctrine of forgiveness does not give us a licence to indulge ourselves without consequence; it gives those who sincerely desire to do good the sense that they are never utterly beyond redemption. If we refuse to grant forgiveness to others or to ourselves, we refuse to accept that those who have committed evil can be anything other than evil people. But this is to make monsters out of human beings. It is to treat people like demons or witches and, as Hegel puts it in the philosophy of history, only to "pursue the power of evil in them."⁹¹ Evil is evil, Hegel never denies that. If he is right, however, there is also great evil in *reducing* people to the evil they inflict on others and in that way demonizing them. There is clearly evil in inflicting physical and mental torture on people; but there is also evil in unforgiving moral judgement.

Religion does not, however, free us from judgement altogether. It leaves us open to civic and legal judgement, and also requires us to accept moral judgement on our actions. Faith is, however, the belief that the moral judge never has the last word, that we can never be stamped by others or by ourselves as irrevocably evil, but are always capable of love. In this way, faith grants us a feeling of wholeness, reconciliation and "infinite worth," even in our moral imperfection.⁹² In Luther's terms, faith accords us the feeling that,

⁹⁰ VPR, 3:74 = LPR, 3:138.

⁹¹ Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte*, 2:891-2.

⁹² Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte*, 2:738.

whatever we may have done, we are “justified” (*gerecht*) in the eyes of God.⁹³ For both Luther and Hegel, such faith frees us from the oppressive sense of always being judged and condemned, and frees us to a life of actual love. For both Luther and Hegel, indeed, the best way to help people become loving beings is not simply to condemn them for failing to live up to the standards of morality, but also to forgive them for so doing. For, as St Paul writes, it is through forgiveness above all that we are “quickened” (Colossians 2:3).

To sum up, then: Hegel believes that Christianity requires that we become moral beings, if we are to become fully human. We must learn the difference between good and evil and accept that we have a duty to do what is good. We must also accept that we are responsible for our actions and must take the blame when we fail to do what is good. Yet, *pace* Nietzsche and Kant, Christianity, for Hegel, does not establish morality as the supreme authority in our lives. Indeed, Christian faith is the belief that the demands of morality can be fulfilled only if morality does not reign supreme. Faith asserts that we can become loving beings only if we stop trying to love through our own moral efforts alone and *let* ourselves be taken over by the Holy Spirit. It also asserts that we can become loving beings only if we accept that we are not subject to absolute, irrevocable moral condemnation, but are forgiven when we go wrong. Christian faith, in other words, is the belief that we meet the demands of morality most adequately when we become *postmoral* children of God. In Nietzsche’s terms, Christianity teaches that genuine wholeness and love are granted us when we pass *beyond* the merely moral consciousness of good and evil.

⁹³ *Luthers Vorreden zur Bibel*, cf. note 5, 174, 187, 202.

THE FINITE DOES NOT HINDER
HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY OF CHRISTIAN RELIGION PLACED AGAINST
THE BACKDROP OF KANT'S THEORY OF THE SUBLIME

SANDER GRIFFIOEN

This essay deals with an aspect of Hegel's philosophy of religion. I am interested in a phrase that occurs at several places, to the effect that finitude *does not hinder*. Why would believers need the assurance that the finite does not hinder? And what does it take to gain this assurance? To find answers to these questions three relevant texts will be analyzed. In addition, Hegel's interpretation of the history of Jesus will be placed against the backdrop of Kant's theory of the sublime.

At the center of this study is the expression that finitude does not hinder. This phrase and similar expressions can be found in Hegel's account of the *Geschichte Jesu*, as found in the 4th part of the *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*.¹ In Hegel's interpretation the meaning of the incarnation is the demonstration that finitude has no power to hinder human beings to reach their destiny. We have to keep in mind that here the word "Incarnation" covers the entire period from the birth of Jesus to the formation of the early church. In fact, Hegel is more interested in the consummation of the process than its historical beginning. This is borne out, for instance, by the famous text in his lectures on history about the new Christian era: the "axis on which the History of the World turns." Although *prima facie* this phrase seems to refer to the birth of Jesus, in fact, as the context makes clear, it speaks about the doctrine of Trinity.

¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, hrsg. von G. Lasson (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag 1966) in 4 vol [hereafter VR; trans.: *Hegel's Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion. The Lectures of 1827*, ed. P.C. Hodgson [hereafter LR] (Berkeley: UCP 1988) 457].

It is the Trinitarian doctrine that is introduced as the axis of world history, as well as “the goal and the starting point of history.”²

What is it in finitude that might hinder? Rather casually one manuscript explains: “Human beings have spiritual interests and are spiritually active; they can feel that they are hindered in exercising these interests and activities because they feel that they are physically dependent and must make provision for their sustenance etc.”³ The answer that the finite does not really hinder, and similar expressions, occur in the *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion* at different places. I shall give three quotes from the final part, viz. the lectures on absolute religion.⁴ The contexts of the three quotations differ. The first one is about the two natures of Christ, the second one comments on the meaning of Good Friday, while the third one is about the promise that God will not judge appearances, but looks into the human heart. Invariably, however, the moral is that the human condition cannot pose a real problem.

The first quotation:

“But what has thereby been brought into human consciousness and made a certainty for it is the unity of divine and human nature, implying that the otherness, or, as we also say, the finitude, weakness, and frailty of human nature, does not damage this unity ...”⁵

My second illustration is taken from the well known comments on the Lutheran hymn ‘O Traurigkeit, o Herzeleid’:

² G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte*, hrsg. von G. Lasson (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag 1968) vol 3, 722 [hereafter VW; trans.: *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, trans. by J. Sibree [hereafter LH] (New York: Dover 1962) 331].

³ VR, 4:138 = LR, 457.

⁴ All of these quotes are contained in the lectures of 1827. Peter Hodgson’s translation of the *Lectures* of 1827 comes with a helpful introduction by the editor highlighting the differences between the successive lecture series Hegel gave in his Berlin Period.

⁵ VR, 4:140sq = LR, 457.

“‘God himself is dead,’ it says in a Lutheran hymn, expressing an awareness that the human, the finite, the fragile, the weak, the negative are themselves a moment of the divine, that they are within God himself, that finitude, negativity, otherness are not outside of God and do not, as otherness, hinder unity with God.”⁶

As for the third illustration, the text starts by acknowledging a difficulty: the apparent discrepancy between the proclaimed reconciliation with God on the one hand, and the *condition humaine* on the other. It then proceeds:

“The difficulty is removed by the fact that God looks into the heart and sees what is substantial, so that externality – otherness, finitude, and imperfection in general [...] – does no damage to the absolute unity.”⁷

1. The No-Hindrance Argument

Obviously, all quotations deal with the status of the finite. More precisely, they deal with the relationship of the finite to the infinite. At the background is the *non-capax* argument, i.e. the standpoint that finitude and infinitude are incommensurable. Hegel attributed the *finitum non est capax infiniti*-argument to Jacobi, as well as, rightly or wrongly so, to Kant.⁸ He maintains the finite does not remain outside the infinite. It is precisely the death of Jesus Christ that demonstrates the possibility of integration. Why? The answer is that this death does not mean the end of a process, but rather a transition to spiritual presence, from a historical mode of existence – i.e. an existence restricted to a certain time and place.

The word “transition” already suggests that integration should not be conceived of as a simple combination leading to an amalgam of finite and infinite elements. Apparently, the finite has to undergo a transition in order to be inte-

⁶ LR, 468 = VR 4:172.

⁷ LR, 474 = VR 4:134 note, 135, 203.

⁸ Cf. LR 173. According to the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Bd. 2 (Basel: Schwabe Verlag 1972) 488, this formula stems from J. Brenz (1583) (cf. ‘Endlich’).

grated. This will be stressed again and again where we come to speak of the process of sublation.

But there is another side as well. Characteristically, Hegel wants to steer clear as well of a total merger. By stressing that the finite does not vanish entirely, he dissociates himself from Spinozism as it was popularly understood, that is as a form of pantheism,⁹ being well aware of the impact of Jacobi's assertion that modern philosophy tends towards a pantheistic denial of Divine transcendence. The expression "does not hinder," or "does not damage," suggests indeed that the finite does not disappear. Apparently, it suffices that its sting be removed. What is called for, in Hegel's view, is a demonstration that the finite lacks real power to obstruct truth. This demonstration Hegel seeks in "the history of Jesus."

A salient feature of the third quotation needs to be dealt with here in passing: the expression "God looks into the heart." Its philosophical equivalent is the notion of *affirmative* judgement.¹⁰ To judge affirmatively means not to judge by appearances, and their inevitable inadequacies, but to consider the essence. The *Philosophy of Right* has this interesting comparison between the state as it is, and a criminal. The existing state can always be better or worse, but is never perfect. However, real understanding abstracts from appearances affirming the substantial. This is also, Hegel adds, how a criminal (*or an invalid*) should be judged, that is, according to his/her humanity.¹¹ One is reminded, of course, of the famous imagery from this book's Preface: the

⁹ Cf. LR, 118-28 and 180.

¹⁰ VR, 1:124, 135, 144, 255

¹¹ Cf. G.W.F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (1821). G.W.F. Hegel Werke, in 20 Bdn., hrsg. von E. Moldenhauer and K.M. Michel, vol 7 (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp Verlag 1970) 399 ff. (§ 258 Anm.) [trans. *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. S.W. Dyde (New York: Prometheus 1966) 247 (§ 258 Addition): "The state is not a work of art. It is in the world, in the sphere of caprice, accident, and error. Evil behaviour can doubtless disfigure it in many ways, but the ugliest man, the criminal, the invalid, the cripple are living men. The positive thing, the life, is present in spite of the defects, and it is with this affirmative that we have to deal."]

rose of (infinite) freedom in the cross of present shortcomings.

2. Sublation

To summarize our findings: the finite becomes integrated, through transition, yet without vanishing. Is it possible to get a clearer view of the matter? My contention is that sublation (*Aufhebung*) offers the clue. There is something in finitude that is cancelled, put aside, annihilated even, and there is something that becomes integrated into a larger whole. It is important to bear in mind that the finite is presented here as a Janus-faced phenomenon.¹² In the first place it connotes human frailty in its externality. However, the same word is also used to refer to the finite moment in divine life. Of course, the process of sublation is meant to connect both these meanings. However, this is not the end of the problem, since integration at all of its levels means that something becomes integrated into the movement of Spirit, while something else is left behind.

To return to the “no-hindrance argument,” we only need to be concerned now with finitude in the sense of human frailty. It should not be forgotten, though, that Hegel captures much more by the same word. Its denotations range from natural conditions of human life, sometimes called “die erste Natürlichkeit,”¹³ all the way to sinful self-isolation, i.e.

¹² The problem raised here is related to Vittorio Hösle’s critique of Hegel’s notion of ‘Einzelheit’ in his book *Hegels System* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag 1988) 233-5. His point is that under this notion two different concepts of *Einzelheit* are subsumed, the one representing unmediated particularity, the other denoting individuality as resulting from a mediation of the particular and the general. See also Brigitte Hilmer’s attempt to solve the problem in her book *Scheinen des Begriffs. Hegels Logik der Kunst* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag 1997) 58.

¹³ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1807). *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol 18, ed. H. Glockner (Stuttgart: frommann-holzboog 1964) 494

evil, on the other hand. Be this as it may, the main point now is that if one loses sight of the different aspects mentioned above, wrong interpretations are bound to ensue. One may be led to think, for instance, that human frailty as such receives a divine *fiat*, and is given a status unmatched by anything in the pre-Christian world. Granted: some texts do point in this direction:

“Death is the most complete proof of humanity, of absolute finitude; and indeed Christ has died the aggravated death of the evildoer: not merely a natural death, but rather a death of shame and humiliation on the cross. In him humanity was carried to its furthest point.”¹⁴

“...or rather that God has shown himself to be reconciled with the world, that even the human is not something alien to him, but rather that this otherness, this self-distinguishing, finitude as it is expressed, is a moment in God himself ...”¹⁵

Yet, on closer scrutiny of these texts the human condition turns out to receive a justification only as a stage in a process of sublation. Tellingly enough, the last quotation ends thus: “although, to be sure, it is a vanishing moment.” Finitude, then, is integrated in order to be brought back to what it is – a fleeting moment. Nowhere it is put more clearly than in this text about human sinfulness: “It is out of infinite love that God has made himself identical with what is alien to him in order to put it to death.”¹⁶

[hereafter Phän; trans.: *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1977)].

¹⁴ LR, 465 note. See the more pregnant version of VR, 4:161: “In dem natürlichen Tode [wird] die Endlichkeit als bloß natürlich zugleich verklärt; aber hier [wird] auch die bürgerliche Entehrung, das Kreuz verklärt, das in der Vorstellung Niedrigste, das, was der Staat zum Entehren hat, – das kehrt zum Höchsten.”

¹⁵ LR, 469. Compare VR, 4:166: “Der Mensch, das Endliche, ist im Tode selbst als Moment Gottes gesetzt [...] Durch den Tod hat Gott die Welt versöhnt und versöhnt sich ewig mit sich selbst.”

¹⁶ VR, 4:168 = LR, 466; compare Phän, 541). One could object that the text deals here with sin, and not with human frailty. However, since a qualitative distinction between frailty and sin is missing in Hegel, it seems permissible to use this text for my purpose.

3. *Inadequacy*

To better understand Hegel's position vis-à-vis the meaning of Incarnation a parallel will be drawn with Kant's *Kritik der Urteilkraft*¹⁷. Two elements will be highlighted. First, the notion of *inadequacy*, and secondly the demonstrative aspect of the sublime. In the first part of this section a structural homology will be exposed. Just as in Hegel, the recurrent theme of Kant's theory of the sublime is the co-existence of two seemingly contradicting experiences: a sense of inadequacy, and an inner assurance of one's ultimate destiny. Of course, a homology does not rule out that great differences exist in other respects. In one respect Hegel's philosophy of religion seems to be entirely unparalleled by anything in Kant's theory of the sublime. Whereas the former presupposes a process in space and time: the history of Jesus Christ, forming the very axis of world history, the latter explicitly denies judgement (*Urteilkraft*) any constitutive role. The experience of the sublime is purely subjective – although it is triggered by objective factors: spectacles of immeasurable vastness or power. Yet, as will be shown in the second part of this section, the difference is less great than it would appear, as in both cases the deepest concern is how finite human beings may gain inner assurance as to their true destiny.

The word *inadequacy* occurs at many places in Kant's section on the Analytic of the Sublime. Most important among the various meanings is the inadequacy of the faculty of sense to grasp a given object as a whole, let alone to comprehend the idea of reason.

The human mind painfully experiences its own shortcomings, and yet retains a sense of being called to overcome this condition.

¹⁷ I. Kant, *Kritik der Urteilkraft* (1790, ²1793, ³1799). *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, hrsg. von der königlich preußischen, später deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 1900) Bd. 6 [referred to as KU according to the pagination of the first edition of 1790; trans.: *Critique of Judgement*, trans. J.C. Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon 1952) [hereafter CJ]].

“But our imagination, even when taxing itself to the uttermost on the score of this required comprehension of a given object in a whole of intuition (and so with a view to the presentation of the idea of reason,) betrays its limits and inadequacy, but still, at the same time, its proper vocation [*Bestimmung*] of making itself adequate to the same as a law.”¹⁸

Kant’s statements as to the inadequacy of human understanding clearly anticipate Hegel’s view of the *Unangemessenheit* of sense perception and intuition (*Vorstellung*) to grasp the deeper meaning of the history of Jesus!¹⁹ Another similarity is that in both cases adequacy is posed as the norm. Kant speaks of the need for an “enlarged mentality.”²⁰

The structural similarity should not blind us to relevant differences with respect to the transition from inadequacy to adequacy. Let us first see how the transition takes place in Kant. He mentions an *incitement* followed by a *thrusting aside* of barriers: “because the mind has been incited to abandon sensibility, and employ itself upon ideas involving higher finality.”²¹ “this thrusting aside of the sensible barriers gives it a feeling of being unbounded; and that removal is thus a presentation of the infinite.”²² What makes the transition difficult to grasp is that he refuses to make a concession to our need to imagine the transition as a process in time. The expression “followed by,” used a moment ago, should be taken as a logical conclusion only.²³ Is it the finiteness of our own understanding that makes it hard to imagine an incitement and a thrusting aside not involving time? Be this as it may, Kant insists that inadequacy and adequacy be kept apart as two different states, the former

¹⁸ CJ, 105-6 = KU, 95-6 (§ 27).

¹⁹ See Hegel, VR, 1.

²⁰ On ‘enlarged’, ‘extension’ and cognate expressions see KU, 94 (§ 26) = CJ, 104; KU, 100 (§ 27) = CJ, 109; KU, 104 (§ 28) = CJ, 111; KU, 109 (§ 29) = CJ, 115; KU 116 (§ 29) = CJ, 119; KU, 123 (§ 29) = CJ, 127; KU, 157 (§ 40) = CJ, 153.

²¹ CJ, 92 (§ 23) = KU, 76.

²² CJ, 127 (§ 29) = KU, 123.

²³ See the word *zugleich* in KU, 99, 103, 109, and *sogleich* in KU, 74.

related to the phenomenal world, the latter to the noumenal, two domains separated by a gulf ("the broad gulf that divides the supersensible from phenomena"²⁴).

As argued before, in Hegel *Aufhebung* offers a clue with respect to the nature of the process of transition. Although he does use terms indicating a gulf or breach, these words obtain post-Kantian meanings. What is said of Plato would also apply to Kant: "Thus the true intellectual world is not a beyond, but the so-called finite is an element in it, and no division exists between this side and that."²⁵ As indicated earlier, these "sides" are rather stages in a process into which the finite gets drawn through an *Aufhebung* (sublation). "Therefore the finite does not endure, and inasmuch as it does not endure, there is also no longer a gulf present between the finite and the infinite, [they] are no longer two."²⁶

In order to elucidate the non-hindrance thesis further we now turn to the sublime as *demonstration*. A salient feature of Kant's theory of the sublime is that it speaks of a spectacle – be it a spectacle of something immeasurably big, or of something powerful. The spectacle elicits feelings of awe and inadequacy among the spectators, creating at the same time an inner assurance of a still greater power, that is, a moral power. Thus reason's supremacy over sensibility is demonstrated.²⁷ Moreover, the human mind, on making itself adequate to grasp – or rather *to be grasped by* – the Idea, turns itself into an exhibition (*Darstellung*) of the highest truth itself.

I would contend Hegel interprets the Incarnation as a spectacle in Kant's sense. Of course the context differs. One

²⁴ KU, li (Einl. IX) = CJ, "Introduction", par. IX.

²⁵ G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*. *G.W.F. Hegel Werke*, in 20 Bdn., hrsg. von E. Moldenhauer und K.M. Michel (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp Verlag 1970) 19:494 [trans.: *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. by J. Sibree (New York: Dover 1962)].

²⁶ LR, 173, cf. also 175 note.

²⁷ Cf. KU, 123, 116 (§ 29) = CJ, 127, 119.

does not find now the standard references to the immeasurable vastness of the universe, to the awe-inspiring sight of tempestuous seas and barren mountains, nor, as in Milton, to “rock, caves, lakes, dens, bogs, fens and shades of death.”²⁸ Instead, Hegel’s interpretation follows the account the Gospels give of the life of Jesus. Yet, as in Kant, the purpose is to demonstrate to the senses and the intuition that these faculties are inadequate. Secondly, by eliciting in the onlooker an inner assurance of his higher powers (“darum fürchtet er sich für nichts, selbst nicht die sinnliche Gegenwart”²⁹), the same spectacle turns him/her into a participant. Finally, as understood retrospectively from the vantage point of the first congregation, the history of Jesus appears as a *Darstellung* of the divine idea.

As our brief exploration shows, it takes nothing short of a *revelation* to demonstrate that indeed the finite does not hinder! Some avenues for further research open up here. It would be relevant to look at cognate analogies, for instance the world as a *stage*, or a *theatre*; history as *revelation* of divine purpose, as a *tribunal*, etc.³⁰ also church history shows parallels.³¹ But here differences should be noted as well.³²

²⁸ *Paradise Lost*, as quoted in Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Oxford: Blackwell 1987) 174.

²⁹ VR, 4:175.

³⁰ I have explored some ramifications in an essay “Nog een geschiedfilosofie” for the *Algemeen Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Wijsbegeerte* 91 (1999) 33-44.

³¹ Just to mention one instance: the celebration of the Lord’s Supper in the Reformed churches traditionally is preceded by the reading of a form containing this sentence: “therefore we are *assured* that neither remaining sin nor weakness can *hinder* that God will accept us in his grace.”

³² I am not implying, of course, an unbroken continuity with the thinking of Kant and Hegel. There is no denying that they seek the archimedic point in the human mind, and in that sense are characteristically modern. As for Kant’s doctrine, it grounds the feeling of the sublime in the mind only (cf. KU § 23): it is only because of a substitution (‘subreption’) that the sense of awe appears to be caused by something outside us (cf. KU § 27).

4. *Staircase to the Truth*

Earlier in this essay, on dealing with Hegel's philosophy, I spoke of the Janus-face of finitude (see 1). On the one hand we have weakness and frailty of human nature as brute facts, on the other hand the same characteristics but now integrated into the movement of truth. In its brute form it needs to be unmasked as both inadequate and as futile, without substance. As we saw, the process of sublation forms the connecting link. It is highly characteristic for Hegel's philosophy, that integration takes the shape of sublation (*Aufhebung*). It is not less characteristic, although much less noticed by commentators, that in a certain sense the integration is never complete. There always remains a remnant of un-integrated, brutal finitude. Or, put differently, the process of integration has to begin all over again.

I am convinced my conclusion does justice to an often-neglected aspect of Hegel's philosophy: the individual having to climb the ladder to the true standpoint again and again. This climbing should be distinguished from the dynamics of Truth itself, i.e. the process of Spirit arriving at self-knowledge through the different (but interconnected) channels of logic, political history, history of art, religion, and philosophy. Hegel's position can be reconstructed as follows: the masses being by their own ignorance barred from access to philosophy need the vehicle of religion instead. It is for them in the first place that the futility of the finite is demonstrated. However, the individual philosopher also has to climb the ladder. He remains a finite person as well. Also his knowledge of the Divine starts with sensible images.³³ So, the philosopher too needs inner assurance that the power of reason surpasses finite obstacles. In his own daily ascent to

³³ Compare Burke's observation, cf. note 28, 68: "But because we are bound by the condition of our nature to ascend to these pure and intellectual ideas, through the medium of sensible images, and to judge of these divine qualities by their evident acts and exertions, it becomes extremely hard to disentangle our idea of the cause from the effect by which we are led to know it."

the truth he repeats so to say the religious education of mankind.

Walter Jaeschke's interpretation of Hegel as a *post-Christian* thinker (see chapter 1 in this volume) may be right with respect to the process of Spirit; it is inadequate with respect to the lasting finiteness of the philosopher as a human being. Let us again look briefly at Kant for a parallel. It is interesting to note that "hindrance" occurs in his famous text about the 'broad gulf' dividing the realm of the phenomena and the supersensible. In a note he states the relation of nature to the realisation of freedom is either one of assistance or of *hindrance*.³⁴ His *Critique of Judgement* is a protracted demonstration that we are warranted to consider nature under the aspect of assistance, instead of hindrance. However, this leaves the question how the individual is to reach the side of freedom. Put differently, the question is how to climb the ladder to Reason. As one commentator states: "It is possible, certainly, to posit a faculty with an honorific capital letter, Reason, which is reliable. But then our access to Reason is not reliable."³⁵ Interestingly enough, this is the context in which Kant at times opens the possibility of divine assistance.³⁶

Finally, there is one more argument to adduce in support of my interpretation. If a process is to be reiterated again and again, its only natural to expect that each of its stages receive a certain right, albeit a limited one. Indeed, Hegel does not adhere to the Buddhist teaching that the ladder be thrown away once the ascendance is completed. Although the finite has no inner halt, yet it is not to be discarded once and for all as a mere semblance. Rather, all the stages on the way to the true standpoint retain a relative autonomy as indispensable stepping stones. A case in point is an argument developed in his lectures on aesthetics. Art receives the function to overcome whatever hindrance the sensuous may present. As Hegel puts it: "Art by means of its represen-

³⁴ Cf. KU, lii Anm. (Einl. IX).

³⁵ Cf. John Hare, *The Moral Gap. Kantian Ethics, Human Limits and God's Assistance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1997) 141.

³⁶ Cf. *ibidem* the first chapters.

tations, while remaining within the sensuous sphere, liberates man at the same time from the power of sensuousness.”³⁷ It already suffices that the sensuous be taken for what it is: “A man is at least made *aware* of what otherwise he only immediately is.”³⁸

Interestingly enough, the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* does point in the same direction. One relevant place is the general remark added to § 29 where it is argued that the immediate pleasure of the beautiful “represents freedom rather as in *play* than as exercising a law-ordained *function*, which is the genuine characteristic of human morality, where reason has to impose its dominion upon sensibility.”³⁹ Or as the original has it: “wo die Vernunft der Sinnlichkeit Gewalt anthun muß”.⁴⁰ Sensibility, then, which is not allowed to exert a power of its own, does receive a place in interplay with other faculties.

Conclusion. The non-hindrance argument is highly characteristic of an idealism – be it Kantian or Hegelian – that can only come to terms with the finite as a passing moment. The passing itself, as conceived in the texts analyzed in this essay, has little of the triumphant March of Mind with which idealism is commonly identified. It is suggested here that

³⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*. *G.W.F. Hegel Werke*, in 20 Bdn., hrsg. von E. Moldenhauer and K.M. Michel (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp Verlag 1970) 13:74-5 [trans.: *Hegel's Aesthetics*, trans. T.M. Knox, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1998) 49].

³⁸ Ibidem, 13:74 [trans.: 48].

³⁹ CJ, 120.

⁴⁰ KU, 115. Cf. Herman Berger, *Leeswijzer bij de Kritiek van de Oordeelskracht* (Tilburg: Tilburg University Press 1997) 111-2.

Hegel's philosophy of Christian religion and Kant's theory of the sublime try to answer the same question: how the painful experience of the inadequacy of finite modes of understanding can be combined with a joyful assurance as to what constitutes human dignity.

HEGEL ON REASON, FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE

TOM ROCKMORE

The rise of Anglo-American philosophy, which resulted in the decline of British idealism, has contributed to the decline of idealism of all kinds. Since the end of the nineteenth century, most philosophers have been convinced that Hegel has nothing useful to say about knowledge. This conviction is now changing as selected analytic philosophers have begun to turn to Hegel to supplement non-standard forms of analytic epistemology. The recent analytic interest in Hegel suggests that after a century of neglect and mainly uninformed critique he might have after all something relevant to say about knowledge. The problem of knowledge is an enormous topic. This paper will consider Hegel's contribution to the epistemological relation of faith and reason. From the contemporary perspective, Hegel's incorporation of faith as a moment within reason is extremely interesting. For reason, as the increasingly obvious failure of epistemological foundationalism shows, cannot demonstrate itself, but depends on faith in reason.

1. On an Epistemological Approach to German Idealism

We can begin with a brief methodological comment. Access to Hegel's contribution to this theme is impeded by the tendency to consider the German idealists as if they had nothing to say on epistemological matters. This widespread, but I think mistaken, tendency is found among at least the following observers: Marxists who accuse Hegel of shamelessly purveying bourgeois ideology; analytic philosophers who belong to a movement which, since G. E. Moore's famous refutation of what he regarded as British idealism, has been mainly hostile to all forms of idealism, including Hegel; in some unusual readings of Kant; in right wing or other re-

ligous interpretations of Hegel; and among a great many scholars of German idealism, especially Kantians. A recent instance is Herbert Schnädelbach's claim in reference to Hegel that although absolute idealism might be an attractive philosophy, we need a true one.¹

The Marxist objection to what they call bourgeois philosophy rests on their claim to go beyond mere false appearance to a so-called true depiction of mind-independent reality. This claim, which is form of representationalism, simply cannot be demonstrated, since there is no way to show that a particular representation correctly represents its cognitive object. I will come back to this problem below.

The analytic approach to Hegel, which both refutes and appropriate elements of his position, betrays an incomplete grasp of his thought. Instances of the supposed analytic refutation of Hegel include the writings of Moore, Russell and many others, who are generally poorly acquainted with the primary texts. Moore's "Refutation of Idealism," which has continued to be influential, seems unconsciously to conflate Plato, Berkeley, German idealism, and the British idealists, who probably have no single common doctrine. Selected analytic figures who have more recently turned to Hegel include Sellars,² McDowell³ and Brandom.⁴

According to the religious approach to Hegel, his main aim is to present an ontological argument for the existence of God,⁵ or to explain history in terms of a divine subject, which is excoriated by Marxists⁶ but extolled by Christians.⁷

¹ See Herbert Schnädelbach, "Warum Hegel," in: *Information Philosophie*, Nr. 4 (1999), 76-78.

² See "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Man," in Wilfrid Sellars, *Science, Perception and Reality* (Atascadero: Ridgeview 1991) 127-196.

³ See John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1994).

⁴ See Robert B. Brandom, *Making It Explicit* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1994).

⁵ See Quentin Lauer, *Hegel's Concept of God* (Albany: SUNY Press 1982).

⁶ See Georg Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein* (Amsterdam: Malik Verlag 1923).

⁷ See Cyril O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994).

This right wing reading originates in Feuerbach. It finds its most powerful expression in Marx, who is paradoxically the leading representative of left wing Hegelianism. It is restated by Marxists and non-Marxists alike, most recently Richard Rorty, the leading contemporary pragmatist.⁸ This reading points to an interpretation of Hegel as mainly interested in subordinating reason to religious faith. But as concerns knowledge, he rather subordinates religion to philosophy, or religious faith to philosophical reason.

With the single exception of Heidegger, I am aware of no reputable reader of Kant who believes that his project is not basically epistemological.⁹ Kant holds that philosophy must be critical in his sense of the term. He suggests that the critical philosophy, the only kind worthy of the name, begins and ends in his position. In Kant's opinion, philosophy in the real sense of the term did not exist before his position and, since there can only be one true philosophy, the philosophical tradition has no need to progress beyond his thought. If the critical philosophy is epistemological, then for an orthodox Kantian epistemology comes to an end in Kant.¹⁰ This view suggests a break, discontinuity, or rupture between Kant and the post-Kantian idealists which simply cannot be demonstrated in the texts.

Accounts of German idealism often do not see any deep connection between Kant and the post-Kantians. According to Habermas, who is in this and perhaps others senses a faithful Kantian, since Kant philosophy has not understood science, hence abandon epistemology.¹¹ On the contrary, with some exceptions (Herder, Hamann, Maimon), Kant's contemporaries were mainly concerned to develop Kant's so-called Copernican Revolution in philosophy. Kant's German

⁸ See Richard Rorty, *Truth and Progress* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998) 300-1.

⁹ See Martin Heidegger, *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik* (Frankfurt/M.: Vittorio Klostermann 1965).

¹⁰ According to Habermas, who is representative, philosophy does not understand science after Kant. See Jürgen Habermas, *Erkenntnis und Interesse* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp Verlag 1975) 12.

¹¹ See Jürgen Habermas, *ibidem*.

idealist successors understood his position as offering an unfinished project. They believed that his so-called Copernican turn was incomplete, and needed to be completed in carrying the critical philosophy beyond Kant. This suggests that, despite the extensive discussion, which has already taken place, there are unsuspected epistemological resources in post-Kantian German idealism.

2. On Faith and Reason

The problem of knowledge points to reason. Whole libraries are devoted to various aspects of this concept. For present purposes, I will arbitrarily consider reason to refer to the human mental capacity through which we arrive at claims for truth and knowledge. This discussion will be narrowly limited to the distinction between faith and reason. The ancient Greeks understood the problem of knowledge as concerned with claims to know the real. They did not need, as now need, to distinguish between reason, which grasps what is and epistemological faith in reason as able grasp the real. This distinction only becomes important when, in the modern discussion, increasingly fewer writers rely on direct intuition of the real. When in Descartes's wake, when even the existence of the real becomes problematic, it is no longer sufficient to suggest, as Plato suggests, that to see the real is to know one sees the real. For the first time it becomes necessary to justify claims to know.

The philosophical relation of faith and reason takes several forms in the debate on knowledge in modern philosophy. One is to hold that a rigid distinction can be drawn between reason and faith, since reason, which is self-contained, is independent of faith. This line is traced by the discussion from Descartes to Kant. The latter clearly, more clearly than his French predecessor, delineates the separation between reason and faith for purposes of knowledge. Kant's claim to limit reason to make room for faith suggests

that reason can be isolated from faith.¹² In this context “faith” is understood as both religious and epistemic. In the critical philosophy, reason, which is allegedly self-demonstrating, has no need of faith. For Kant, we know and know that we know in a way which, as in Descartes, is beyond the possibility of doubt, but which, unlike Descartes, is wholly self-contained, hence independent of faith. But unlike Descartes, whose position apparently depends on God’s veracity, for Kant knowledge depends on nothing more than pure reason alone.

A second approach, which is familiar since the Middle Ages in Christian philosophy, and which in German idealism is best represented in Schelling, is to subordinate reason to religious faith, in a word to think within the grounds of revelation. Since we will be taking a secular approach to knowledge, nothing more need be said about a religious strategy for knowledge here other than to note that there are still some philosophers whose normative conception of the discipline requires them to think within a religious framework.

A third approach, is to hold that epistemic faith, as distinguished from religious faith, is not opposed, but rather intrinsic, to epistemological reason which, finally, depends on faith in reason. According to this line, which is illustrated in Hegel, and perhaps in Fichte as well, reason is not and cannot be self-justifying in more than a relative sense. If this is correct, and if the post-Kantians develop the spirit of Kant’s Copernican turn, then part of the price to do so is to reject Kant’s conviction that reason is self-demonstrating, hence separable from faith.

3. *Hegel’s Critical Rejection of Pure Reason*

This point can be illustrated with respect to Hegel. The *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Hegel’s first, perhaps greatest,

¹² See Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Riga: J.F. Hartknoch 1781, ²1787) xxx.

treatise is divided into accounts of consciousness, self-consciousness and reason. The latter is sub-divided into the analysis of four forms of reason. Hegel's critical reactions to the Kantian and religious forms of reason offer important clues for the epistemological function of his view of spirit, that is, to its specific cognitive role within his own view of knowledge.

Hegel's critique of Kantian reason is quite obviously a critique of a critique. The analytic objections to idealism at the beginning of the twentieth century tended to oppose idealism to empiricism. These objections suggested that idealists, including Hegel, are anti-empirical thinkers. On the contrary, Hegel's critique of Kant points toward the empirical side of Hegel's position.

In the critical philosophy Kant rejects immediate knowledge, including classical empiricism, on the grounds we cannot know that we know a mind-independent object. More precisely, in Kant's opinion there is no way to know that we know any object that we do not ourselves "construct." This insight is doubly significant. First, it serves to disqualify all prior theories of knowledge on the grounds that it cannot be shown that we in fact know an object to which there is no epistemological link. Second, it suggests a necessary condition which must be met by any successful theory of knowledge without, however, providing that theory.

In Kant's opinion, an acceptable theory of knowledge must be "constructivist" as well as empiricist. He proposes a second-order empiricism, which begins in, but is not limited to, experience whose general conditions it identifies. Kant's critical philosophy proposes to identify the general conditions of the possibility of objects of experience and knowledge. The difference with respect to classical empiricism is clear. Classical empiricists make claims for immediate knowledge from experience that Kant rejects. Instead he proposes to identify the conditions of empirical knowledge.

Hegel follows Kant in rejecting the classical empiricist claim to immediate knowledge but rejects as well Kant's claim to identify the conditions in general of empirical knowledge. In opposing the distinction between the conditions of knowledge and knowledge, he rejects the very idea

of pure reason as Kant understands it. Hence, he rejects a critical, or transcendental, approach to truth and knowledge. According to Hegel, it is not possible to elucidate the conditions of the possibility of knowledge in general for all rational beings. It is only possible to elucidate concrete conditions for finite human beings in a particular situation.

It follows that he has available only two possibilities: the abandonment of reason, hence the skeptical rejection of knowledge claims, which he rejects; or their justification on other grounds. Through spirit he develops a tertiary form of empiricism that provides for a non-Kantian, hence non-theoretical, a posteriori, hence practical justification of claims to know which, however, also rejects the classical empiricist claim to direct knowledge of the world.

4. *Hegel's Epistemological Critique of Religion*

I am suggesting that Hegel's view of knowledge depends on his conception of spirit. In this interpretation, spirit is central to Hegelian epistemology. This interpretation requires us to understand how spirit functions in Hegel's overall position. Spirit is more often mentioned than studied. It is mainly studied from a religious perspective.¹³ In order to comprehend its specifically epistemological function, spirit must be reclaimed from its religious function within the right wing reading of Hegel's thought. As a first step, a distinction must be introduced between his views of religion, which are not relevant for an appreciation of his epistemological views, and his understanding of the epistemological limits of a theological approach to knowledge. Hegel clearly rejects a theological approach to knowledge, for instance the very idea of understanding the problem of knowledge within the framework of revelation.

Hegel's epistemological critique of religion derives from his rejection of a representational approach to knowledge.

¹³ See Alan Olson, *Hegel and the Spirit: Philosophy as Pneumatology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1992).

This approach is featured in the critical philosophy. In his famous letter to Markus Herz (21 July 1772), Kant insists on the need to understand the relation of the appearance (*Vorstellung*) to the object (*Gegenstand*). The critical philosophy works out a representational approach to knowledge. Yet as Plato already shows in his attack on the mimetic form of art, without direct access to the real we cannot know that a representation represents. A representational claim for knowledge rests on the assertion that the representation adequately depicts, or in some ways corresponds to, the object in question. In other words, the defense of a representational approach to knowledge also commits one to the defense of a correspondence approach to truth and knowledge. But a correspondence approach to truth fails. For it can never be shown that the representation of the object corresponds to the object represented. It follows that claims to know must be justified conceptually, that is without relying either on privileged claims to know the real or on representations of it. Hegel's specifically epistemological appreciation of religion depends on his conviction that it merely represents what it cannot know since knowledge depends on concepts (*Begriffe*). In a word, Hegel's view of the epistemological limitations of religion merely points to the difficulties of any representational form of knowledge.

5. *Spirit and Epistemological Justification*

Hegel's conception of spirit derives from his reading of the theological and secular philosophical traditions. For present purposes, we will bracket the complex religious and secular genesis of Hegel's understanding of spirit in order to concentrate on its epistemological function. Hegel already poses the problem of knowledge in the *Differenzschrift*. His critique of Reinhold's founding and grounding tendency entails his rejection of epistemological foundationalism, which it illustrates, as well as a commitment to epistemological circular-

ity. In this respect, Hegel follows Fichte's rehabilitation of a concept that had been rejected since Aristotle.¹⁴

In the *Phänomenologie*, Hegel continues Kant's concern with knowledge in utilizing the latter's term "cognition" ("*Erkennen*"). Cognition is neither knowledge by acquaintance nor knowledge by description. It is rather an approach in which knowledge is not, as in realism, the result of an immediate grasp of what is, or cognition of mind-independent external reality. For purposes of knowledge, Hegel draws a distinction between what is now called realism and idealism. For Hegel as in idealism in general, knowledge is the result of the objectivity and content which emerges from thinking ("*die Objektivität und Inhalt des Gedankens*"¹⁵). In sum, Hegel's view of knowledge rejects the justification of claims to know either immediately or a priori. Knowledge claims are justified through their relation to spirit understood as an impure, situated, contextualized, historical form of reason. In other words, claims are accepted or rejected through their coherence or lack of coherence to the more basic convictions present in the wider context at a given historical moment.

6. *Hegel's View of Spirit and Contemporary Epistemology*

Three points are interesting here as concerns contextualism, relativism and historicism. First, the idea that claims to know are not absolute but relative is widespread in analytic philosophy roughly since the later Wittgenstein. Moore's commensensism rests on a classical empiricist view of immediate knowledge of the real, or mind-independent reality. In his critique of Moore's commensensism, Wittgenstein suggests that claims to know are indexed to conceptual

¹⁴ See Tom Rockmore, *Hegel's Circular Epistemology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1986).

¹⁵ G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*. G.W.F. Hegel Werke, in 20 Bdn., hrsg. von E. Moldenhauer and K.M. Michel (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp Verlag 1971) 20:66.

frameworks which are neither true nor false.¹⁶ This claim is central to the analytic critique of classical empiricism waged throughout much of the twentieth century by the later Wittgenstein, Quine, Sellars, Davidson, Rorty and others. The analytic critique of empiricism means that claims to know must either be given up, hence resulting in skepticism, or, as Wittgenstein later maintains, indexed to a context. Consequences of this view, which narrows the gap between idealism and analytic philosophy, are seen in recent work by Quine, Sellars, McDowell, and Brandom, who reject the classical empiricist idea that so-called facts can be picked out in isolation from a framework, but not Davidson and Putnam, who take a more classical approach. In suggesting that claims to know are contextualized, well before the later Wittgenstein and his followers Hegel suggests that they are not true as such, or in abstraction. They are true only in relation to a prevailing view, attitude, conception, perspective, or *Zeitgeist*. Claims to know are hence never absolute but always relative, never independent of, but rather always dependent on, other views that are subject to change, hence indexed to time and place.

Second, Hegel's position features epistemological relativism. Relativism has consistently enjoyed a poor reputation ever since Plato's attack on Pythagoras. The suspicion that relativism is not a respectable epistemological doctrine has often given rise to silly claims. An example is Rorty's suggestion, which no one seriously defends, that a relativist thinks that every view is as good as any other one. The same suspicion has further given rise to Davidson's sophisticated attack on Kuhn as defending radical incommensurability, leading to his own rejection of conceptual schemes.¹⁷ But first-order evaluative (this is good) and constative (this is red) claims are always and necessarily relative. There is no alternative, short of skepticism, to abandoning relativism. If we reject direct intuition of the mind-independent real as

¹⁶ See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ed. by G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright (New York: Harper & Row 1972).

¹⁷ See "On the Very Idea of A Conceptual Scheme," in: Donald Davidson, *Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1991) 183-198.

well as epistemological foundationalism, the only general way to make out claims to is to index them to whatever conceptual frameworks we may happen to hold. I see no way around this claim. The problem, then, is not whether one defends epistemological relativism, but rather which among the many types of epistemological relativism it makes the most sense to defend.¹⁸

Third, there is the complex, unclear series of issues referred to under the general heading of historicism. Here it will be sufficient to call attention to the link between relativism and history. Kant, who rejected claims for immediate knowledge, linked them to a conceptual framework. He believed he could preserve the traditional ahistorical character of philosophical claims to know in discerning a single, invariant conceptual framework, independent of time and place. This approach fails in his position since he was unable to show epistemological closure. More precisely, he was unable to show that there is a single, univocal conceptual framework that can in fact be deduced.¹⁹ This approach is further inconsistent with the spirit of his position. For his Copernican turn, which is his major theoretical discovery, suggests that as a necessary condition of knowledge the concept must be adequate to its object. As objects change, the concepts through which they are to be understood must also change. It follows that the very idea of a single, immutable categorial framework adequate for any and all objects of experience and knowledge conflicts with the nature of his thought.

This point can be put more generally by calling attention to the change of conceptual frameworks and history. Conceptual frameworks are not invariable or immutable, but variable and mutable. If claims to know are relative to a particular conceptual framework, and conceptual frameworks change, then knowledge claims are historically relative. Unlike Wittgenstein and most other contextualists, Hegel cor-

¹⁸ See Joseph Margolis, *The Truth About Relativism* (Cambridge: Blackwell 1991).

¹⁹ See Stephan Körner, *Categorial Frameworks* (New York: Barnes and Noble 1970).

rectly realizes that contextualism and historicism are inseparable. As soon as one accepts contextualism, one accepts historicism. In this case, historicism means that claims to know are intrinsically historical since knowledge is itself historical. That is an important insight, which has not been widely understood.

This insight directly contradicts the ahistorical approach to knowledge, which has dominated the entire Western philosophical tradition. Ancient Greek philosophy is dominated by Platonic realism, as distinguished from Plato's position, which cannot now be determined, that to know is to know the real.²⁰ Platonic realism is still widely defended in different forms of contemporary thought. Realism typically features the two-fold claim that there is a mind-independent external world, and that we know it.²¹ Yet realism is a problematic doctrine, since the claims on which it rests are problematic. For there is no way to know either that we know the mind-independent external or even that there is such a world. The advantage of Hegel's shift to a historical view of knowledge is that for perhaps the first time he clearly sees an alternative to the ancient, but indefensible claim to know the world as it is. Kant points to the problem without providing the solution in suggesting that to know is to know what one "constructs." Hegel provides the solution in his insight that we know the human world "constructed" by finite human beings within the experience of consciousness.

7. *Conclusion: Hegel on Spirit and Faith*

This paper has examined Hegel's view of the distinction between epistemological faith and reason. Like Kant, Hegel

²⁰ See Myles F. Burnyeat, "Idealism and Greek Philosophy: What Descartes Saw and What Berkeley Missed," in: *The Philosophical Review* 91/1 (1982) 3-40. Burnyeat argues that even at its most radical Greek thought remained thoroughly realist.

²¹ See Michael Devitt, *Realism and Truth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1991).

isolates reason from religious faith, but he does not isolate it from faith. He rather makes epistemological reason depend on epistemological faith, or faith in reason.

Hegel, who adopts this view in his first philosophical publication, maintains it in all his later writings. His insight can be supported by the evolution of the discussion of knowledge. As early as his initial critique of Reinhold's reformulation of Kantian foundationalism, Hegel understands that the most promising approach to knowledge lies in a historicized form of contextualism. This leads to a circular view of the relations between knower and known, subject and object, our view of what is and what is within consciousness. I conclude that since we cannot know that our reason tells us the way the world is, and reason is our only epistemological tool, we must have epistemological faith in reason.

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RELIGION AND THE POVERTY OF PHILOSOPHY

WILLIAM DESMOND

1

Often we come across references to the richness of religion, relative to which the more reflective and analytical and conceptual approaches of philosophy appear to be impoverished. This is one sense of the poverty of philosophy. There is some truth to this view, but it is not rich enough a view, and indeed not rich enough in its view of philosophical poverty. Interestingly enough, poverty and richness are notions that here easily convert into each other. I mean that the richness of religion is not separable from its sense of its own poverty. I mean also the hesitation of religion, no matter how rich in significance, to claim for itself an appropriation of the fullness of the divine. Religion is richest when it confesses its poverty, just in relation to what exceeds all human efforts, religious or other. Richness is poverty, poverty is richness.

An analogous point could be made about philosophy: the forms of articulate reflection which a good philosophy offers may seem poor relative to the ontological richness of the happening of being these forms of thought essay to determine. Or contrariwise, the sheer thereness of that happening may seem poor in articulation by contrast with the rich reflective determinations wrought by sound philosophical thought. The poverty of philosophy is now richness, the richness of philosophy is now poverty.

What I propose here is in the nature of an exploration rather than a set of incontrovertible assertions. I am searching along a line of probing, even halting inquiry, in which I must hesitate to be too assertoric. My remarks are searching, especially since what I propose goes, in many ways, against a dominant self-understanding of philosophy in relation to religion, namely, that religion is to be interpreted,

understood and judged, whether negatively or nor, before the tribunal of philosophical reason. But how does it stand with philosophy, if we are open to the ultimate claim that being religious may make on us? I am not countering philosophical reason with an opposing irrationalistic fideism. My purpose is to pose a *question* to philosophical thinking at certain limits. While I will make assertions and even suggestions about the direction the question points us, the main difficulty is to *hear* this question, for some of our characteristic ways of thinking deafen us to it. How deafen? We philosophers think we *have already heard and answered* the question. My argument will be that there is another question that has not been heard, or only rarely or sporadically, and that this further question solicits a new origination of philosophy: a post-philosophical reverence that yet is philosophical through and through; a reverence that perhaps some philosophers once knew, maybe sometimes in a taken for granted way, when religious reverence was also taken as granted.

For suppose there is a *two-way* intermediation or communication between religion and philosophy, and not just a singular direction from religion to reason? I can accept something of the truth that being religious seeks to be understood or to understand itself, and that philosophy is absolutely indispensable in this, and indeed can bring its own richness of thought to bear on that task. But, suppose having done this, either well or meanly, there still are further perplexities to face? And suppose we reach even a measure of philosophical fulfillment, when we even claim to do conceptual justice to the richness of religion, suppose that then, even then, a new bafflement comes on one, and a new search and probing makes its call on us. The two-way intermediation of philosophy and religion may make other demands on us *as philosophers*. We might have thought we had conceptually consummate(d) religion, even the consummate religion; but instead of finding ourselves within the whole that finally has closed the completing circle around itself, we are drawn on into a new outside, a new desert even, indeed a new poverty beyond the play of the first poverty and richness.

Suppose we are led to wonder if we must set out again in quest for a different richness of spirit, by comparison with which the richness of seemingly consummated philosophy now seems poor. We seem to know everything, and come to know in everything we know nothing. What do we know when we know that nothing? Has it to do with a different poverty of philosophy, and indeed a new seeking for the religious that is less a reversing of any ascent from religion to philosophy, as one that finds itself called to a new affiliation of religion and philosophy? Has it to be a new *being between* the religious and the philosophical, in which philosophy would not even dream of claiming to comprehend the religious, though all its resurrected energies are devoted to just some such comprehension? I am open to correction, but having studied Hegel on just this point for more than twenty five years, I am minded to think that this matter is beyond Hegel's absolute knowing. I will later indicate why.

What recommends undertaking an inquiry of this sort? The philosopher may be indeed a perpetual beginner, but there is, so to say, an age in that perpetual beginning when, though determinate cognition may be relatively matured, metaphysical perplexity seems darker and more intractable than ever. Then the unavoidability of some such quest grows on one, even as one seems to come into the competent mastery of fundamental philosophical possibilities. Standard possibilities of relating the religious and the philosophical seem also less and less satisfying, though this is not to deny their pertinent nourishing qualities. But they can seem to provide inadequate fare at the limit of religious wondering and philosophical perplexity. And some of these standard models are deeply at work in German philosophy, as I will below try to illustrate.

There is also the fact that we live in an epoch that is, so to say, saturated with determinate cognitions. If I am not mistaken that saturation seems to go along with a defect of reverence.¹ Defect of reverence not only makes us defective

¹ On this see my contribution "On the Betrayals of Reverence," in: *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 65/3 (2000) 211-230; also in: *Beyond Conflict and Reduction: The Interplay of Philosophy, Science and Religion*,

humans, potentially it makes us monsters. We are saturated with knowings that, so to say, do not save; knowings that seem to make us more and more lost, even though they illuminate many a dark spot in the mysterious cosmos we inhabit. The more light we throw on things, the more things as a whole seem to become dark. The more we know, the more we sink into absurdity. Must not philosophers also be willing to risk thinking about this strange light and darkness; willing to explore other knowings that may address and perhaps counteract the defect of reverence?

To be ready to enter into that perplexity is not simply a matter of the further expansion of that cognitive saturation. It calls for a discerning of the kinds of knowing, and with special alertness to the danger of the false doubles of saving knowing. Could we not think of philosophy thus: as mindful care for the counterfeits of saving knowing? And what if it were the case that these counterfeits more often than not baptize themselves with names like "absolute knowing?" Would such a discerning of the false doubles of saving knowing be more "absolute" than "absolute knowing?" Would it be more absolute, more absolved, just because it comes into a new poverty which gives it no place to lay its head, no place to consecrate, with an idol of philosophy, any claim to self-certainty. Such absolved discerning would seem to belong nowhere, and yet perhaps it is devoted to the care of the most intimate ontological promise of all places.

I stress that my point here is not directed against knowing, but concerns knowing at certain limits, where one comes to know that one does not know, where yet also one may know in not knowing that something of ultimate moment is being communicated. In that sense, I speak about something that cannot be quite stylized as faith seeking understanding. Rather it might be likened to understanding seeking an other knowing, that may indeed resurrect its mindfulness of what was most energetically intimate to faith. The couplet faith and understanding may not be

enough, nor a dialectical unity of this doublet. Beyond dualistic doubling, and dialectical unity, a different One is to be acknowledged and a different redoubling of mind fostered.

As I imply, saturated with knowings, we may be malnourished in reverence, and that saturation and hunger may feed in us the dragon's teeth of the monstrous. Discerning the knowings means also facing the monstrous. What would the nature of monstrous knowing be? In our time, one might claim that monstrous knowing is evident in the devouring will to power of instrumental reason. This seems a far way from idealistic Vernunft, but as I have tried to indicate elsewhere, both are modes of mind in which knowing is finally concerned with its mediating with itself. Again ask: Beyond the knowing of the monstrous, and monstrous knowings, is there a saving knowing that is more than concerned with mediating with itself? And does this have anything to do with becoming "poor in spirit?" Can philosophy also become poor in spirit. Is this, for example, what Hegel's spirit deals with? Or is it what it too studiously avoids? Is the self-completing spirit too puffed up with itself? Puffed up spirit? Could we make sense of poverty of spirit in terms of Hegel's Geist/spirit. I doubt it.²

Discernment of knowings is itself a knowing, though not knowing simply as self-activity. It is a knowing in act, not a known product, and more that just self-activity. For dis-

² Were one to take seriously what Hegel has to say about the *religious vows of poverty*, it is clear that he has little sympathetic appreciation of what is at stake. One cannot but think that Hegel shows a too solid bourgeois prudence, perhaps even smugness, by contrast with the joy in destitution of Francis of Assisi. One could see Hegel sympathize with Bernard, Francis's father and wealthy merchant, as he tried to beat some worldly sense and sense of responsibility into the *Poverello* ... Get a job! But could you say the same about the deeper spirit of philosophy? It has no job, and is always being told to get a job; and always getting a job to mask and hide its deeper impulses from those who are wise in worldly ways ... and this more and more in modernity. The success of modern philosophy – does it grow out of shame at its uselessness? (Consult Descartes's repudiation of the useless ancients.) And now, after centuries of trying to be of some use? Does philosophy end up useless in quite another sense, when the monster of instrumental reason tries to devour everything, including philosophy?

cernment is not self-concerned; it is concerned with the nuance of happening; and if with itself, with itself as nuanced happening also. Philosophy asks for this discernment. A philosopher without reverence is a thinker defective in *delicatesse*.

2

We are all familiar with the *emergence of philosophy* itself from religious sources. You might say, philosophy enters into a double relation to those sources: at once open to their truth, and yet questioning of them. This double relation can be developed in different directions. One direction: The openness to the truth of the religious source may mean a continual devotion of philosophy to reverence, and hence a community, even friendship, between source and offspring. A somewhat different direction: Though philosophical questioning may be done with the aim of searching that truth, it may also call that truth into question, as perhaps not the truth it claims to be. Such questioning may put a strain on the community between them, if the philosophical questioner simply insists that the religious other answer in the terms philosophy proposes. The enactment of philosophy is often carried through with a mixed formation of the double relation. I think that, generally, premodern philosophy maintained a more flexible, even fluid balance of openness and questioning, of affiliation and searching. Modern philosophy, on the whole, accents the side of questioning in a manner that alters that affiliation into a potential opposition, thus tempting philosophy to stake a claim to dominance. Here are some reasons why this happens.

There is the obvious reason that in modernity questioning itself is such that *doubt* has wormed its way to the heart of thinking. Then there is philosophy's insistence on its own autonomy, in the face of the seeming all-inclusive character of the religious or theological horizon. Philosophy reinvents its own ideal in terms of the paradigm of autonomous, or self-determining knowing. Result: all others are summoned

into the openness between themselves and philosophy, to answer philosophy's questioning of them, relative to their conformation to the ideal of rational self-determining knowing. It is hardly surprising that these others, and not least religion, fail to conform to this ideal. But is this *its* failure, or a different failure, or defection, of philosophical thinking?

There is also this reason. Religion, like the givenness of being, seems to show a face that is *equivocal*: it seems constitutively ambiguous. This equivocity calls for interpretation, you say. Of course. But everything turns on what kind of interpretation. One kind of interpretation will insist that in itself the equivocity cannot be allowed to have the final word, because it does not deliver to us its intelligibility in a univocally determinable way. In face of this equivocity, philosophy will intensify its own demand for univocal determinability, especially when new forms of determinative cognition, such as the mathematical, seem to show increased power to dispel the ambiguity of initial conditions. Univocal determinability, goes with increase of power over the obscure and threatening conditions of existence for us: the darkness of being overcome, the darkness of the divine, as eluding our grasp in mystery impenetrable. Rational enlightenment, it seems, must say "no" to all that. If this is how we look, how can religion look but defective?

Think of it this way: I love the other, and when I do, I trust the other. When I begin to question the other, I am already on the verge of falling out of love of the other. My questioning risks disrupting my trust. Can philosophy be a form of questioning in which that love is not killed? Can there be an aggressiveness to questioning that is counter productive: killing the welcome of the other that must be allowed, if the desire to know that other is to meet that other in the terms of its own self-manifestation? Questioning that insists that the other answer to it, seems to deny this welcoming way, and hence proves false from the outset to that self-manifestation. I prove more myself than anything else; the other serves my will to be self-determining, and my claim to self-determining knowing. But have I not already fallen into falsehood, just in this ideal and claim of knowing? And so one asks: Can philosophy be a questioning

in which that basic trust is not destroyed; or a way of mindfully recovering that trust, which again and again is lost in our ontological and cognitional aggression on being? If this is possible, it seems only so on condition that philosophy or the philosopher find again a way to a condition of mindfulness alike to being religious, or being reverent.

3

One will immediately meet the rejoinder: *philosophy is needed by religion*. The meaning of religion is ambiguous, and so even if it does embody truth, that truth must be clarified rationally. This is an immanent demand of the religious itself. And hence faith seeks understanding. It is faith that seeks: *fides quaerens intellectum*. You must not caricature the philosopher as the dog of disenchantment. He is an agent of continuing the religious into the rational: faith itself seeks reason, because faith itself is rational.

Of course, there are multiple branching here too. Question: Is faith then acceptable because, after all, it is rational; and it is qua rational that it is to be accepted? Voila: then the philosopher represents the higher ideal, since not only can he or she be religious, they can be more, both religious and more explicitly rational. Religion is more fully completed in the explicit rational comprehension of its intelligible truth. Religion for the masses who believe, philosophy for the masters who know. But, and this is the point now, the masters of those who know can be also friends of the masses (Examples: consult the Platonic guardians and their *eleos*, compassion for the many; consult the *Früheste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus* (*Earliest System Program of German idealism*) on a certain dream of the affiliation between philosophy, religion, the people; consult even Marx's inverted, that is, atheistic version: those with the political wisdom of communist science will supply the head to the body of the proletariat, otherwise indigent in knowing.)

By contrast, consider the matter from this angle: suppose reason is derivative from faith, then perhaps it is a thinking transformation of a basic faith; the basis is a kind of "faith," which finds a mindful form in reason; reason itself is grounded in a more fundamental *fides*, or confidence. The confidence reason has in truth is *given* with and to reason, not just produced by reason through itself. This fundamental *fides* is a primal gift. Philosophy is an attempt to understand and make intelligible its truth.

Of course, one must distinguish different senses of *fides*. There is, as I am suggesting, an elemental, but also relatively indeterminate sense of fidelity; to what, one is not exactly clear; and the question: fidelity to what? is crucial. There is another, second sense which concerns a more determinate faith: commitment of trust to a more particular set of views or propositions or a specific religious tradition, sometimes with determinate dogmas and so on. I will be more concerned with the first, but it is inseparable from some confidence in the second determinacies also. Or: My interest is not with sheer indefiniteness, nor fixed determinacy, but with more of something of the play *between* indeterminate and determinacy; and again not an interplay that leads to the determination or self-determination of the indeterminacy as indefinite. I am concerned with an awakening to the overdeterminacy of the indeterminate in the surplus of its transcendence as other. Is this the primal faith: not the faith that we have in it; but that it has in us, in that what we are given to be is as such, just in the communication of being as determinate and self-determining from the primal original of this surplus overdeterminacy of transcendence as other? God in religious language?

What further can we say of faith as confidence, whether elemental or derived? Confidence is a *con-fides*, a *fides* "with," that is, it is already in fidelity with and to an other. The "con" is a "cum" or "with" that already announces a basic community: this bases faith, con-fidence. And that other to reason *confides to reason*, unknown to it at the start, a grounding confidence, or trust, that there is truth and intelligibility to be attained, were it further to seek. But this means of course, that reason is never simply self-determi-

ning; for this confiding, this *fides* "with," this confidence, is what energizes all its processes of determining, including its own confidence in its self-determining powers. The reason of the philosopher is first given to us, before we can even dream of insisting that reason accept only what it gives to itself. In fact this second insistence, means that the grounding *con-fides*, or confidence has already been reconfigured, and not to mince words, perhaps corrupted. The gift of thinking to itself is betrayed by a thinking that insists only on thinking itself. True thinking asks of us a spiritual fidelity.

Again If I am not mistaken, almost all philosophical discussion takes the directionality which follows faith seeking understanding, whether this leads to a new fraternity between philosophy and religion, or to a war of enlightenment debunking. As agent of reason, philosophy sets the terms. But if my above proposal has truth, is the matter not the other way round? It makes us newly ask: How does *philosophy* stand, if it is the derivative? What does *intellectus* seek? Understanding also, hence *itself*? Or does it seek what is *other* to itself, If so, would not philosophy have to be a thinking what is other to thought thinking itself? (Think here of Plotinus' One above thought thinking itself, by contrast with Aristotle's *noesis tes noeseos*; think of Hegel's post-Kantian re-echoing of the latter, and his not really knowing what to do with Plotinus' One above.) What is at stake is our reconfiguration of the above double relation of openness and question. If I am right, the dominant philosophical reconfiguration insists that the openness is rethought in terms of the questioning of philosophy as finally determining the terms of the relation. What I am suggesting is that, beyond *fides quaerens intellectum*, we must ask if there is an *intellectus quaerens X*...?

Why ask this? Again in an age in which all reverences are under onslaught, in which scientific understanding seems more and more to assert a hegemony over all things, human and non-human, perhaps it is not more understanding of *that sort* we need, but more than anything else a new reverence, and perhaps a kind of saving knowing. If so, this would amount to a significant qualification of how we define

the quest of philosophy. Certainly, the ideal of self-determining knowing would have to be reformed. If we think the religious is always behind us, then we will look to the future with our faces turned away from reverence. But what if proper reverence is what we need now more than anything else? We would have to turn our faces again. And the point cannot be to give up thought, but to think in this turn more truly. But the poverty of philosophy may have to be relearned to think more truly in this turn.

4

The strategies we find in German idealism are continuous with the dominant possibility outlined above. I will remark on Kant and Hegel. First Kant: he is comfortable only with religion within the bounds of reason. What are those bounds? Those set by reason. Reason questions, reason defines itself as the form and act of openness; reason also is the standard and judge. But what then of the relation and openness *between* reason and religion. It seems to be defined by one side. Do philosophers gives *themselves* too much confidence here, go too easy on *themselves*? (I say: *We are obscure to ourselves, yes. But you say: no, I am not obscure to myself. Reply: very well, your clarity obscures your obscurity, and therefore doubles the obscurity to yourself.*)

Must the philosopher here confess to the danger of being a critical judge, namely, being caught in a “conflict of interests? Does the suspicion of “special pleading” apply as much to (a-theist) philosophy as to (theist) religion? But suppose we ask again: What if reason is derivative of a source that is enigmatic to reason itself? Suppose its mother is closer to the condition of reverence. Well then, we witness the offspring placing constraints on the elder source. The offspring is perhaps embarrassed by the excess of its original source. It will plead or demand: please mother be moderate! You will make a show of yourself, in this higher age of rational enlightenment. You will make a show of me! And

how much of shame and embarrassment is at work in all this? More than we often acknowledge.

In passing: Is it not so that shame is a very important cause of people turning from religion? We are made to feel ashamed of what we believe; we are not undermined by arguments but by silent strategies of embarrassment. Silence that shames silences many people. Nothing has to be said, then. Or in another image, the intellectual must be rationally purified, that is, *detoxified*. Religion is the intoxicant that must be purged. But what if the detoxicant is itself a toxin, a toxin that now has circulated in the blood line of many intellectuals, especially since the 18th century? Well then these toxins may now even seem like nutrients in that blood stream. Were we to be weaned from addiction to them, we might have a different delirium tremens, a secular delirium, so to say. And suppose, in any case, that these nutrients are really debilitants. What then would a healthy philosopher need? A new therapy and a new immunity to toxins, secular and religious. The philosopher would have to become like a strong *taster of poisons* (like those who once served the sovereign). Being such a taster, he or she may find that some of the poisons will debilitate; hence, counter-powers must be energized to empower the body human to continue to be and thrive; and perhaps among those counter-powers must be a religious reverence.

Perhaps Kant tried something like this when he suggested: God impossible to prove, theoretically, God necessary, morally. So we get in Kant the double vision: dare to know, you cannot really know. Kant seems like a transcendental equivocator, vacillator: cautious and bold; fearful and certain; skeptic and dogmatic in one. Nevertheless, his moralization of the religious amounts to a sentencing of religion to clean up its act, to wash itself of its excesses. Strip it of its non-moral accretion; make it rich in morality, but poor in everything else. And when it is stripped of these others things, but clean in moral message, let it then come before the tribunal of reason, now with its case properly prepared. I cannot but see this as an extraordinarily condescending,

patronizing attitude³: Yes, yes, of course, we will be reasonable about religion; but that means religion must be reasonable for us: and so, more than anything else, it must present itself to us in the terms we recognize as valid; this is our openness to its self-manifestation. But where is the openness to *its* self-manifestation? Surely this has been reconfigured into something like: Show yourself but as I can see you, and then I will grasp you to my bosom. That is to say, the appearance of religion before the tribunal of philosophy is the appearance of philosophy as the judge that will endorse only itself, and so religion perhaps does not appear to philosophy, but philosophy once again appears before itself. I fear this is a tribunal of tyranny.

What then is the new critical philosophy? Is it the new autonomy for itself, but the old heteronomy for the others? Is it the new skepticism against the others, but the old dogmatism for itself – even though it arrives at this new disguised dogmatism by a detour through the ruins of the old open dogmatism? Is this why one gets the impression: the more I can criticize the others, the more I am content with myself? But you say: look I criticize myself! You do, you do. But is it so, only to expel what is other in you; what you have come to hate in yourself, that is to say, religion?

I would say that this expulsion of the other in philosophy itself has a significant life in German philosophy. And then the attitudes goes around: Let philosophy hate itself because it is only secret theology; and this hated other in the self of philosophy must be purged. Marx will use this toxin of self-hatred against the residues of theology in Hegel; Schopenhauer against the residues of Christianity in Kant's morality; Nietzsche against almost everyone else; and then some like strategy seems newly resurrected in Heidegger, or perhaps some of his deconstructive progeny who plot the overcoming of onto-theology: the whole logocentric tradition is the old "other" in the self of thought that must be purged.

³ Consider how Kant in *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* exoriated the spiritual despotism of *Pfaffentum*, and the *pappas*; but is there not a streak of philosophical despotism in his denunciation?

I beg to differ. My sixth sense warns me that here lurks the danger of the secret tyranny of philosophical critique. The tyranny is sometimes aroused and virulent, other times indifferently sleepy. One wonders what is up especially when new preachers of hatred emerge to scourge the older preachers of hatred, so-called; the anti-religious preachers who preach their own hatred, oddly fiery with a passion that puts one more in mind of mutant religion rather than religion deconstructed. If this clerisy were alive and held power in a previous Inquisitorial age, what books might be burned!

I have an image of even the genial Hume looking on approvingly, with fire-reflecting eyes, as the tomes of theology and metaphysics are, in his immortal words of philosophical toleration, "consigned to the flames."

But suppose this. Suppose in this expulsion of the other philosophy suffers a wound at its own hand, though it seems to wound religion; it is its intimate other that is thus wounded, and so itself. It thinks its hemorrhage is its true freedom; as a medicine, it has resorted to bleeding itself, and toxins seem to leach away, leaving it purer and whiter, but it is in fact dying, though it seems to have adjusted well to the spiritual feebleness in all this, and will say, it is doing just fine, thank you, never felt better. Why then does it seem such a pale wraith of its former self? I do not quite blame Kant for this. But was he a great witch-doctor who insisted that more bleeding of the patient would hurry up the recovery? If so, there is too much of snake oil in the therapeutic promises of transcendental philosophy, and too precious little of saving knowing.

5

I turn to Hegel who, you say, is surely more complex and rich. I have studied Hegel extensively in relation to the point

at issue.⁴ One of the great attractions of Hegel is just the seriousness with which he takes religion. By comparison, on this point at least, there is something callow in the rationalism of Kant. Openness to the rich diversity of the religious, without loss of desire for speculative comprehension: extensiveness of range and intensiveness of understanding; Hegel sought to embody both. Philosophy itself, he knew, was nourished on religious sources. In Hegel's case, we find the speculative transformation of trinitarian motifs. And the speculative transformation has to be nourished on what it transforms, even if the results of the transformation may not please the devotees of the source transformed. Hegel's passion for the religious does not seem to be false. Perhaps it was more open in the younger Hegel, you suggest? But this is not so easy to say, since one finds here also a philosophical gene that, though is later will become recessive in Hegel, later again will be no longer latent in thinkers like Marx and Nietzsche. I refer to the less restrained critique of religion. (This I take as *one* lesson from that gene bank called the *Earliest System Program*) There was always something more to Hegel, which is why I object to the contemporary taste for what I will call Hegel Lite. Hegel Lite is a watered down version of Hegel, suitably drained of the headier religious and metaphysical intoxicants, just about palatable to the middling tastes of the last professors. (There are also versions of Kant Lite, and Nietzsche Lite, to name two of the most obvious of the new intoxicant-free brands.)⁵

The more I dwell with the issue, the matter itself, the more discontented I become with Hegel, especially in rela-

⁴ For instance in my book *Beyond Hegel and Dialectic* (Albany: SUNY 1992), and more recently in *Hegel's God – A Counterfeit Double?* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing 2003).

⁵ We say *in vino veritas*, but perhaps neither Hegel Lite, not Kant Lite nor Nietzsche Lite have enough of the real stuff to loose the tongue of truth. Think of Plato's *Symposium* if the drink drunk were some form of vino Lite. Would we have the divine parhessia we so love about eros: both in its poverty and in its festivity? Perhaps instead we would have the domestic sobriety of a seminar on a passionless puzzle, pleasing to technical tinkering or professorial excogitation.

tion to religion.⁶ Ask again: What would saving knowledge be? One might claim that this is the special care of religion. If so, such a saving knowledge would not only be a knowledge in the theoretical or propositional sense, since it would be enacted in ritual and sacred dramatics, and “proved,” in the sense of “put to the test,” in its ethical incarnation. Saving knowing, answering the urgency of ultimacy, would be shown in its imagistic dramatics, and in its being ethically “lived out.” Saving knowing would be neither theoretical nor practical, though clearly there would be elements that answer to both of these: theoretical since it would enact a fidelity to its understanding of what the ultimate is; practical in that the ethical “living out” would be what is called for as enactment by the knowing itself: knowing the truth is doing the truth, and thus being true to it. This is not just knowing but saving.

What is saving, what is being lost? The ultimate good of being for the human being. Hegel, I think, tends to favor a more “theoretical” tilt with respect to the mission of philosophy. Perhaps this reflects too strong a commitment to the typically modern bias towards philosophy as science. The pre-moderns were often more aware of philosophy as a way of life. When Hegel makes claims about absolute knowing, does he trade in the innuendos of offering a kind of saving gnosis? What kind? Certainly there is his famous claim in the *Phenomenology* to have overcome the ancient love of wisdom and to have achieved science itself. Hegel seems excessively guarded about philosophy as a way of life that seeks a saving knowing for the fundamental existential perplexities of life. He stresses the *what* known more than the *way of knowing*, the way of being, the way. In some respects, Kierkegaard was right, as were those who were unhappy with the “intellectualism” or “rationalism” of Hegel. Does speculative gnosis, in fact, turn out to *mimic* a saving knowing? Saving knowing, relative to religion, is not ritualism, not fideism, not rationalism, not traditionalism, though

⁶ On this more fully, see my *Hegel's God: A Counterfeit Double?* Cf. note 4.

there are elements of each; it names an understood and affirmed intermediation, binding the singular self, the communal and the divine; and it is enacted dramatically both in the religious mimetics that are the rituals or sacraments of a community, and in living itself in the configurations of ethical life that embody our willingness to participate in saving, and this by keeping and realizing properly, the promise of our being.

What of Hegel's version of *fides quaerens intellectum*: religious *Vorstellung* seeks, or spirit seeks in the *Vorstellung*, though an immanent transformation, to be articulated as *Begriff*? The truth of the same immanent spirit is an immanent God. And the truth of the immanent God is also the truth of the religious *Vorstellung*. *Vorstellung* has the content, but the form is such as to separate it into an elsewhere. There is the residue of an as-yet-not overcome transcendence. The *Vorstellung* is a immanent sign of transcendence, but this immanence, in principle complete, is also the sign of incompleteness for Hegel. *Begriff* completes what this sign means: namely that the immanence is not total; and the completion will be with this total immanence; only the concept has both form and content, each immanent to the other, hence both as moments of a total process of immanent self-determination, the immanent self-determination of *Geist* itself. God is self-determining in the knowing of philosophy itself as absolutely self-determining knowing. God's otherness as other is transcended. Transcendence is transcended and now is dwelling with full immanence. In philosophy, faith has found what it sought: understanding. In completing itself thus, it also abolishes itself qua faith.

But does it? That is one crucial question. What if the *fides* is not just an implicit form of the understanding this philosophy here privileges, namely self-determining knowing? What if the sign of transcendence is the communication of the otherness of the divine that cannot be comprehended in terms of any forms of self-determining knowing: a different communication to our middle condition, a different intermediation of transcendence as other to our self-transcendence. The immanence of transcendence in the religious sign is at once a way to name a pointing to transcendence,

to confess the failure of the name, and in that confession to give a richer sign of success. The poverty of the sign is just its richness.⁷

In Hegel's approach, we find a dialectical variation on the theme of the One and the double. For him *Vorstellung* remains burdened with an as-yet not overcome doubleness. The content is the One, but the form separates the One into a here and a there, a now and a yonder, an immanent God and a transcendent. The form points to what is other to what is immanent in the form, but does so by making immanent that other, and hence the otherness signaled is also undercut by the immanence necessary. But because it is the otherness that is signaled, the representational immanence wavers about its own absolute character. And this wavering, this being in two minds, this double seeing, this being cross-eyed between the here and the beyond is what must be overcome in the return of the double to the all including, indeed self-appropriating, self-including One. The One in which all is immanent, and which itself is the absolute of immanence, is more absolute than what for Hegel is the potentially false double of the transcendent other and One. Transcendence is appropriated as self-transcendence, which as absolute, is absolutely immanent. But only the *Begriff* is able to comprehend and do justice to this absolutely immanent self-transcendence: it is the One at home with itself, beyond the double vision, and this being "beyond" is not beyond but is the death of all beyonds. Religious *Vorstellung* is, from this point of view, conducive to the false double of transcendence: an other transcendence, not an immanent self-transcendence.

On this schema, Hegel's philosophy *must* claim more than religion, even if it also claims that its "more" is the same "more" as that of religion. It is not quite that religion is poor and philosophy rich. Both as absolute are rich; but philosophy is richer, if that can be said, in having the form of richness; religion is poorer in lacking the form that is true

⁷ I have said something about these points in chapter 4 "Gothic Hegel," in: *Art, Origins, Otherness* (Albany: SUNY 2003); see also *Hegel's God*, cf. note 4.

to the richness of immanent content. You cannot say that Hegel will want to impoverish religion in any straightforward way. Still in the relativity of religion and philosophy, it is clear that the latter consummates even the consummate religion, and so is religious richness exceeded.

Hegel will claim that the religious is “preserved” by and in the philosophical. What this means is controversial, and indeed not easy to comprehend. Why would not the religious be preserved, if it is closest to the origin, and the origin continues to work in all? But there are preservation and preservations. Some preservations effect a transmutation of the original; and hence what they preserve may well turn out to be a false double of the origin. Hegel’s dialectical *Aufhebung* claims to redouble the religious original in conceptual form. And it does so, because the claim is made that the religious original risks being a false double – a false double of the absolute, only to be grasped in its Oneness by the *Begriff*.

But what if religious reverence lives more intimately with the primal confidence, more faithful to the origin, even if in the temptations of idolatry it must also struggle with the counterfeit doubles of God? And what if philosophy has preserved a false double of religion? Then philosophy would be the one that is trading in conceptual counterfeits. I mean that if philosophy gives us a concept of the religious that is false to the religious, its sublation of this false double, may itself produce a false double of the One. Certain ways of philosophizing might then be seen as ways of succumbing to the temptings of an idol.

How would you decide this issue, apart from seeking a discerning knowing that tries to discriminate the difference of the true One and the counterfeit doubles? You could not decide in terms of reading Hegel alone. For his thought is in question just in terms of this issue. One could only judge Hegel to be right or wrong in terms of a radical discernment that returns mindfully to what is at play in the deepest intimacy of religious reverence. But if you are deficient in reverence, how could you do that? Once again, reading Hegel alone will not be enough to meet that deficit. Indeed perhaps philosophy alone can never address that deficit, since any

philosophy *insisting on itself alone* either instantiates that deficit or gives rise to it.

One might well argue, in Hegelian fashion, that religion may be the potentially false double of the truer One of the *Begriff*. But what if the One of the *Begriff* is itself a counterfeit double of the One, true living One? And thus so, because the *Begriff* has not properly comprehended the doubleness of the *Vorstellung*? And this, despite the fact that the counterfeit double *mimics almost exactly* the true original. The religious double as *Vorstellung* may be the truer image of the living, true One. Philosophy may have erected its own surrogate idol in place of the One; and by that erection demoted the imagistic richness of the religious sign into the form of a potentially false double. But again what if the so-called false double for the dialectical sublation may in fact be the truer double, just in keeping open the reference to transcendence as other? Its power to keep open may be the *essential poverty* of the religious image, which just as poor, is the rich power to open up a way to transcendence, or for transcendence to come into the between, with no reduction of the otherness of transcendence. The constitutive ambiguity of the religious image would not be a *defective poverty*, so to say, but an *effective poverty*, a rich poverty. It might be the truer way to say what cannot be absolutely said. Or rather, the absolute saying for us is just a saying that, in being said, immediately confesses its own poverty as a saying, and thus converts its temptation to false success into a silence, a silence perhaps more successful than the concept that crows about its own intellectual glory on the speculative apex. What crows on the apex has already fallen into the pit. Its ascending crowing is falling. It seems to know itself as the intoxication of moving vertically, but its intoxication with itself is as the descending movement that mimics ascent as its reversed double.

But you object: Surely, Hegel's dialectical preservation of the religious involves both a "yes" and a "no." Yes, I agree. But the character of the "yes" and the "no," and *how we balance them*, is all important. If the balance is finally a "no" to the surplus of transcendence as other, then, in my view,

its “yes” shows itself already to have lost the passion of the religion – regardless of its claim to say “yes” to it.

6

This equivocal passion for the religious, and its less, brings to mind a further, related reversal in which poverty and richness get differently defined. I think now of the left-Hegelian line of thought. Suppose this line inherits from Hegel an equivocal counterfeit of the religious, counterfeit in dialectically reducing transcendence to immanence, equivocal in thus claiming to be true to the religious itself. I mean now especially a counterfeit version of the “unity” of the human and the divine. This line of thought then proceeds to “deconstructs” this counterfeit, but in a manner that wills to abort, even kill more effectively the passion of the religious. Thus Marx can be seen as genuinely an heir of the dialectical equivocity of Hegel’s “yes” to religion. He univocalizes this equivocity, itself richer by far than the univocalization. He gives us a humanistic reduction of the religious, which puts humanity to the forefront as the original, and the religious image, in its reference to God as other, as the counterfeit double. To get to the richness of this true original, this counterfeit double must be all the more killed in the womb: radically, in the roots. For at the true root will be humanity as the original.

It was Marx after all who wrote a book entitled *Das Elend der Philosophie* (*The Poverty of Philosophy*) responding to Proudhon’s *Philosophie de la misere* (*Philosophie des Elends*). This book deals mainly with money, economics, workers and machines, competition and monopolies, interest rates, strikes and so forth. But even here our question comes again, like a catastrophe in the old tragedy: Are we once more dealing with a counterfeit double of the true condition of philosophical poverty? What is meant by this talk about the poverty of philosophy. A number of things for sure, but one of the recurrent claims is that philosophy, and Hegel’s is no exception, is secret theology. This is put down

as an *accusation*, as a defect. A philosopher who remains a secret theologian is one whose blood still runs with residues of obscurantist toxins. One recognizes what will become standard slogans. The philosopher emerges under the cloak of the priest, and the cloak was both disguise and protection. Now we need courage to throw off the cloak. We no longer need to be in the guise of another, no longer need protection. Now autonomous, we can go on the attack against the others that kept us in submission hitherto.

Schopenhauer used this strategy against Kant; as Feuerbach and Marx use it differently against Hegel; as Marx uses it against others who have not "overcome" theology fully. And did not Zarathustra, with a little more delicatessen, at least confess, and not totally without admiration: the blood of the priest still runs in my veins? Heidegger, with a perhaps grimmer Germanic tonality, offers us the program of overcoming ontotheology, overcoming philosophy as metaphysics, itself cartooned too easily, with a little help from Nietzsche, as the caricature of Platonism, the philosophy of the yonder world, now inverted into the cybernetic world here, where, as Heidegger *rightly* says, with all due genuflections to the piety of thinking, that only a god can save us now. But what god? And what God can save us truly and not betray us with another counterfeit of saving? Do I have to mention certain kinds of deconstruction thinkers who, it sometimes seems, need to accuse and exorcise ghosts, the ghosts of ontotheologians past that, Banquo-like, rise again and again from their graves. Is this an ontotheologian that I see before me? What power conjures up this apparition? Macbeth, killer of a king, had a guilty conscience, but what of the conjuring power of the post-metaphysicians? What saving power will exorcize these apparitions?

But enough. The refrain returns, now loudly, now muffled: The poverty of (old) philosophy is here that it is disguised theology. This is a defect of (old) philosophy. Ergo: empty philosophy of theology and traces of nostalgia for religious reverence. Then it will assert its full autonomy. Even more: by emptying itself of the religious, perhaps it will be what religious previously claimed to be, namely, absolute. The poverty of philosophy will thus be reversed into infinite

richness, as now at least it can truly fulfill itself as philosophy. No god above it, no religion either. Itself absolute, *ab-solo*, on the height it itself is, or creates itself to be, determines itself to be. To empty philosophy of religion is to empty it of its emptiness, and positively to appropriate the absolute of religion, and free it from this form of being the false double.

This means: the process of emptying is an appropriating that also makes philosophy a kind of religion, in the transformed sense, or mutant, or corrupted form we see, for instance, in the philosophy-inspired totalitarian project of the Marxists. This is a topsy turvy world. But who now knows how to distinguish what is up and what is down, what is on the heights and what is in the pits? For fair seems foul and foul seems fair in this topsy turvy world wherein religion is the false double of man, masquerading as God. The new philosophy sees God as the false double of man, hence man as the true One, redeemed from God as the false double. *The saving knowing of philosophy* now come to this: *being redeemed from God*. But what if philosophy here is merely recreating itself as the false double of God? It is poverty qua lack thinking that its own lack will redeem itself by its intensification, which surely follows when it asserts itself *ab-solo*, autonomous. The negative asserts its absoluteness in the process of negating first the divine other, then itself. But in this topsy turvy world in which up is down, and down is up, in which poverty is richness, and richness is poverty, we may well be dragged into a devouring vortex of destitution, as all are dragged into the hollow pit of our spirit's emptiness.

7

What of a different sense of the poverty of philosophy? This is a large question, demanding more amplification than here can be given. I can only make a few suggestions, focusing on reverence as something crucial for philosophy, as well as religion. We might think of religion as rich, rich in rever-

ence. We might also think that this is closer to the primal reverence for the origin out of which determinate religions, and philosophies take more definite form. This primal reverence is, so to say, a *passio essendi*, before it is a *conatus essendi*: a patience of being, before it is an endeavor to be.⁸ To be is to be given to be, primally. To think is also to be given to think, primally. No human being understands the primal sources of mindfulness; and the more one advances in knowing, it seems to me, the more one knows this baffling happening. It is not that there is always more to be known, though this is true; it is that the very upsurge of mindfulness, from the origin, shows itself in excess of what we determinately manage to thematize or bring to articulate expression. There is an inward otherness to thinking itself that is not completely self-mediated in determinate mindfulness itself; and yet this “more” can come to be minded more and more, the more mind mediates with itself. Nevertheless, what also comes to mind is this: *The immanence of thought intimates what is other to thought as immanent to itself.*

My point now: Religions are often closer to acknowledging this more primal “more.” Artists often too have a finer sense of it, than those philosophers who fixate on what can be fixed in determinate propositions. We are closer to the source of determining, prior to and in excess of determined products. A consequence of this is that “autonomous” knowing is always indebted to secret others. Knowing is heteronomous. Perhaps knowing must be “poor in spirit” to inherit the earth; though it does not think about what it will inherit, for it is as if it were nothing, and hence less and less thinks about itself alone. Philosophers often interpret this in terms of the impersonal universal, but I think it is more complex. Inheritance is a divestiture.

And were *intellectus* to quest now for *fides*, what would it seek? Among other things a new confidence, in the face of the loss of confidence, and the advent of “being as nothing” we find with nihilism. This return to zero would concern a new openness to a confiding that was always at work,

⁸ See my *Ethics and the Between* (Albany: SUNY 2001) chapter 12.

though not always noted. It is granted, but was taken for granted; and so we did not grant it. If so, philosophy could not be described as a self-determining knowing, or the quest of it. Philosophy would have to include openness to other knowings, beyond self-determining thinking, and qualifying this and its claims. It would not only open to these knowings, such as we find in art and religion. It itself would have to *embody something* of such other knowings. Thus it could not be that philosophy redeems dialectically, as self-determining, what remains determined by an other source, as in art and religion. This would be to be blind, not only to the truth of this other knowing they differently communicate, but also to philosophy's own vocation to be true to this other knowing in itself. Philosophy would have to recover its roots in the primal reverence for the origin, and seek to say again, however poorly, what is communicated in the granting of the primal origin. The One is communicated, or communicates being, and in the primal reverence, we participate in the love of that origin and communication. Its character is always too much for us.

This poverty is clearly as much redolent of richness as of destitution. It also refers to the potentially radically character of the openness of thinking. I am as nothing; but strangely as nothing, I am potentially open in an unrestricted way to what is other, and also to a recreation of what I am, beyond the fixation on the currently sedimented determination of self. Poverty may mean a return to a kind of formlessness – a dissolving of the potentially false forms, or counterfeit doubles that fix the energy of coming to be; return to the more overderminate energies of coming to be that is not a matter of a determinate process of becoming this or that, or a process of self-determining becoming of self – though these latter are not precluded. Coming to be is more primal than becoming. Likewise, there is also a “being as nothing” more primal than determinate negation, which already presuppose something been given to be, or as hav-

ing already become thus and thus. Philosophy as “poor” might lay mind open to this “being as nothing.”⁹

One of the reason why philosophers can be defective in reverence has something to do with the feeling of power that comes with the power to question, and the way questioning can aggressively smother the openness to what is other, even though it loudly proclaims its interest in the other. Certain modes of questioning subject the other to questions, and so risk refusing our being given over to the other as other. Of course, there can be different ways of questioning; some more indirect and coaxing, hence less lacking in reverence; other more hectoring, and intrusive, and indeed shameless. There are questions posed in silence that willingly wait for an answer, that do not force the answer. This waiting for an answer is closer to a devotion to questioning; where questioning remains faithful to the wonder of original astonishment. This is not the condition of a sponge, but an alertness of mindfulness that is sharp with intense watchfulness. But it is the question, it is not the answer. And it knows it cannot be the answer, because of its poverty.

Philosophy claiming to be science can lose this expectancy: the determined content, as determined by intelligent thought, is articulated into a defined intelligibility; and its definition may seem to have nothing to do with the waiting, but just with the *determination of thinking itself* to mark as its own the intelligibility of what seems other. We move from the indeterminacy of the original astonishment to the determination of intelligible thought.

If we remember that philosophy names a *philia*, hence an affiliation, we may be less likely to lose the expectancy of a fitting poverty. Of course, we may grow familiar with our

⁹ Return to zero is related to the sense of philosophy as a form of what I call *posthumous mind*, which is always open to being reborn, out of the nothing. What is this? I have made some remarks in *Philosophy and its Others* (Albany: SUNY 1990) chapter 6, and in *Being and the Between* (Albany: SUNY 1995). Certainly there is a seeing things new, as if anew, for the first time. Philosophy, as Socrates said, is the practice of death: but there are different deaths. As there are also different lives.

friends, but genuine friendship never loses the essential *admiration* for the excellence and worthiness of the other. Such admiration is not an indefiniteness to be made determinate. It is in a different dimension to determination, and hence cannot be made the object of a scientific objectification. Admiration is a poverty: it is the worthy other that counts; I am as nothing, in the admiration; I am there, but my self-insistence is put out of play. Admiration is a cousin of reverence, even adoration. And friendship here is of *sophia*, and not just *scientia*. *Sophia* as *sapientia* includes the essential element of "tasting." There is something more akin to the art of the connoisseur. I do not mean this in a merely aestheticist sense: philosophy is not quite just a matter of "taste," and yet a kind of taste, or discerning savoring is needed. I mean the mind of finesse is needed here. Can finesse be made systematic? Not quite, since it is addressed to a singular happening. It is idiotic, as is the happening that opens up the admiration. The friend is idiotic: this friend; not friends in general.¹⁰

Consider this too. Tasting is a kind of *porosity*: the soul or mind that tastes is as a passage way. Could one say that thinking that "tastes" is not unlike a prayer? I mean it finds itself awakening to a process already in play, in which it participated, though it did not know it before, and now it wakes to what makes it possible, and awakes to an admiration and love for what is given as good in this process. Prayer is waking up to the already effective communication of the divine: not just our communication with the divine; but our being already in that divine communication, within which we participate, now in sleep, now more mindfully awake. Prayer is awakening to the living communication of the divine in the finite *metaxu*. We do not produce it; it is not the result of our determination or self-determination; we are "determined," better, released into the middle where we can sink deeper into ontological sleep, or begin to awake more fully to what communicates us to be at all.

¹⁰ On what I mean by the idiotic, see chapter 3 of my book *Perplexity and Ultimacy* (Albany: SUNY 1995).

The *philia* of *sophia* is a friendship of thought that loves what is most worthy to be thought.¹¹ One might recall Plato and the friends of the forms, but I am talking about an ontological trust. If faith is a confidence, something is confided to thought, and out of this confiding, thinking has confidence that its being is to be in relation to being as true. Being true is just the reliability of the trustworthy. Suppose *sophia* were a woman, then one have to say: Not I am confident first, but she confides in me; her confidence endows me with trust; and I am confident having been endowed with trust. Philo-sophia is the friendship of being true, a fidelity itself seeking the utmost in the reliability of trustworthiness, not only in itself but in being as other to self. Once again, there can be no self-determining of this reliability or being true, or being trustworthy. Self-determining in a reliable sense is itself grounded on this more primal reliability. If it is religious reverence that more intensively places us into attunement with this more primal reliability, there can be no *Aufhebung* of this; the confidence of dialectical thinking is itself grounded in it; for every effort of thought is itself grounded on it, endowed by it.¹² There is here a kind of

¹¹ Think also of the poverty of philosophy, in terms of the *penia* of *eros*, about which Socrates speaks: the Socratic seeker seems lacking, a beggar, shoeless. Socratic destitution is related to that of some of the cynical figures – but without their shamelessness, perhaps. Of course, there are different kinds of shamelessness (innocence is shameless, evil can be shameless, but there is a being good that is also shameless), as there are different kinds of poverty.

¹² One might here ask: Why did Hegel despise Schleiermacher? Different reasons, as we know, some more personal and professional, some intellectual. We know the contempt in his remark on Schleiermacher's view of religious *dependence*: and so the true Christian would be a dog. Hegel disdains dependence. And perhaps there is some truth to his remark. But then there are dogs and dogs. My point is not a defense of Schleiermacher, or attack. But maybe there is a poverty of philosophy that has some family relation to a kind of new cynicism. This will seem like "going to the dogs." It will be so, in a way. I mean it will strip off the unnecessary and rediscover the elemental, just like the *dog philosophers*. Hegel had little time for Cynicism as merely "popular philosophy". There is nothing here for his system. But this may well be the whole point. The dog philosophers deal not with phi-

ananke that frees: indeed the endowment allows the freedom to question and criticize the *ananke* itself; but the questioning itself is a participation in primal reliability. Questioning, one might venture, is only possible on the condition of this more primal reliability, mostly incognito and taken for granted in the questing of thinking. Were the questioning to refuse it, or become absolutely ruptured from it, it would descend into absurdity and madness. If there can be no *Aufhebung* of this, philosophical thinking in a post-idealistic mode must relate to it differently.

Let me conclude by putting this poverty of philosophy in terms of Hegel's absolute knowing. How does Hegel put it? In the *Phenomenology*, he speaks of the goal to be achieved (of absolute knowing) as the point where knowing no longer

losophy as system but as a way of life, and with the saving knowledge of finding finite equilibrium in the fragility of the universal impermanence. Philosophy is a therapy of life in the widest sense, an askesis of life that superficially seems to just say "no", but more deeply is a "yes" to life in poverty itself. This is what a new cynicism would be: love of the elemental, even in destitution itself. Think here of the reverence for the sun. Alexander, the world-historical conqueror, had enough finesse to suspect a free sovereignty to Diogenes that made him wonder if there was here something that his bestriding the world had somehow missed. World-conqueror to the dog-philosophy: Ask, and I will give you what you want. Answer from the dog: Get out of the way of the sun! Hegel admired Alexander the more: the world-historical world conqueror is rich in significance; the poverty of the dog-philosophy is a blank; and Hegel cannot quite see the sun that shines in and through and on the blank. Of course, Diogenes is hardly an attractive model for professors who perhaps have more of the pampered poodle in them than something of the wilder hounds. Yet for this cynic, being a dog was being closer to be divine. At home with self, at home with being in its otherness: needing nothing, in destitution itself. Hegel notes only the shamelessness, in a bad sense. The cynics deserved their name as dogs, for "the dog is a shameless animal," Hegel says. Does this not also mean that the (dog-)Christian of Schleiermacher is also a shameless animal? But is there not a reverence of the cynic, as when Diogenes calls himself the watchdog of Zeus? It's a dog's life, but there is a genuine line of inheritance from Socrates to this dog's life. And perhaps there is an elemental reverence also with the (dog-)Christian, and this reverence is inseparable from the poverty of radical ontological dependency.

feels the need to go beyond itself. Must we not propose what looks like exactly the contrary? We come precisely to the point where knowing knows that this is just what it must now do: namely, exceed itself into what is beyond it, and not only now at the end, but because what originates it is always beyond it; and so in coming to itself, there is no sense in saying it has reached the point where it need no longer go beyond; and it is only coming to itself in a derivative sense, because more fundamentally it is coming in wakefulness of its original endowment and the primal reliability. If it goes beyond itself, it is not only from need, but from an enigmatic surplus or plenitude of being, always at work, though not always known. It is the original endowment that allows it to go further and be beyond itself, even as it allows it also to be freely self-determining.

To know this would entail a non-Hegelian kind of “absolved knowing.” “Absolute knowing” would be a poverty of mindfulness where it is driven out beyond itself into a divine darkness that draws it forth with the promise of truth that ultimately is more reliable than all the systems of determined truths our knowing seems to have determined for itself. The poverty of this non-knowing is a richness of transcending porosity that wakes to itself as a love of transcendence as other. It is no longer an erotic self-transcending that wakes to itself only; in waking to itself, it is an agapeic transcendence that finds itself shaken up beyond itself. The point would be not Hegelian knowing reaching the point where it no longer needs to go beyond itself, but rather a turning point when knowing is nothing, nothing but desire to go beyond itself. Its poverty is a return to zero, but also is infinitely in excess of itself, to God. This I call an agapeic mindfulness.¹³

¹³ On agapeic mindfulness more fully, see chapter 4 of my book *Perplexity and Ultimacy*, cf. note 10. I would not argue for the “weak thought” of Gianni Vattimo: aesthetic and somewhat mimicking the religious. This “weak thought” seems debilitated mindfulness in the wake of the failure of the great “successes” of modern philosophy. I am speaking of a different poverty of philosophy, a second poverty, which resurrects ontological perplexity, resurrects astonishment at the limit

This knowing of non-knowing, at the extremity of determinate and self-determining cognition, is the point of exodus where *intellectus* must seek a new faith, a new fidelity, or rather renew a fidelity that its previous efforts to know seem to have betrayed. The betrayal calls itself disenchantment, but this disenchantment is falling out of love; enchantment is needed in a new form, as a falling back into love. Is this what we need as philosophers: a knowing love, a loving knowing? A love that knows, or a knowing that loves, is always a con-fides, a confiding; we are confided to, in being confiding. Could one say that prayer is what gives us this con-fidence? Con-fides is given to us; we become giving, having been given to, and in the passage of giving that gives us to be at all. As waking up to mindful praise of this passage of giving, philosophy too is a kind of piety.

All those chilled by the disenchanting effects of Enlightenment will remain cold to the suggestion of this piety, perhaps even squirm at it. They will be colder than Hegel himself who did say, after all, that philosophy too is *Gottesdienst*.¹⁴ But I repeat again that the point cannot be to take arms against thought and knowing. The poverty of philosophy names a renewed beginning, not just a full stop – a condition of mindfulness out of which more determinate thinking can emerge again. (It is a commencement that, like a graduation, is a re-commencement.) This involves a subtle displacement of philosophical concerns that can issue in and be reflected by more systematic forms of thinking, as well as in a different articulation of the fundamental philosophical perplexities, including those we find in idealism, with its diverse emphases on (the forms of) self-determining knowing. The source, forms, and telos of knowings are exceeded by what cannot fully be formed in terms of self-determining knowing. We need intermediated knowings that recall us to a space *between* philosophy and religion, *between*

of all determinate, self-determining knowing. Metaxological metaphysics seeks to be itself in the community that thought has with the religious and the artistic.

¹⁴ On this more fully chapter 2 of my book *Beyond Hegel and Dialectic*, cf. note 4.

art and philosophy. The poverty finds itself exposed to the more original endowment of mindfulness, laying itself open anew to more primal sources of thinking in the return to zero. If it issues anew, its new forms are never the same again. The return to zero, as an effective, not defective poverty, so to say, endows a task for philosophy beyond idealism.

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